

Red Cross rehabilitates Iraqi water treatment plant

BAGHDAD (AFP) — The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said here Tuesday that it has brought back into operation a long-disused water treatment plant near Baghdad. The ICRC said in a statement the station in the province of Diyala can produce 250,000 litres of drinking water per hour. It said it imported equipment valued at \$100,000 to put the station back in operation. The ICRC has been working with Iraqi authorities since 1991 to improve water treatment and sewage systems, which suffer from lack of replacement parts and treatment materials. According to an ICRC official, the organisation dedicated \$5 million in 1997 to water treatment and sewage projects in Iraq. Iraq has been under U.N.-imposed sanctions since Baghdad's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

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King reaffirms rejection of unilateral Israeli moves that hinder peace talks

Arafat asks King to help make upcoming meetings with Clinton successful, describes them as last chance to save peace process

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Tuesday discussed the peace process that has been deadlocked for months due to Israeli delays in implementing the agreements signed with the Palestinians.

During the meeting, attended by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the King reaffirmed Jordan's rejection of any unilateral Israeli steps that would paralyse peace making with the Palestinians.

The two leaders also discussed the recent political developments in Israel following the resignation of Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, a critic of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's peace policy with the Palestinians.

Palestinian Ambassador in Amman Omar Khatib told the Jordan Times that the Palestinian leader has briefed the King on the talks he held last week with U.S. special envoy to the Middle East Dennis Ross, who failed to narrow the gap between the Palestinians and Israelis.

Mr. Khatib, who attended the meeting between Mr. Arafat and the King, added

that the Palestinian president also briefed King Hussein on his plans to meet with U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington next week.

Mr. Clinton is scheduled to hold separate meetings with Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Arafat in Washington on Jan. 20 and 22 respectively.

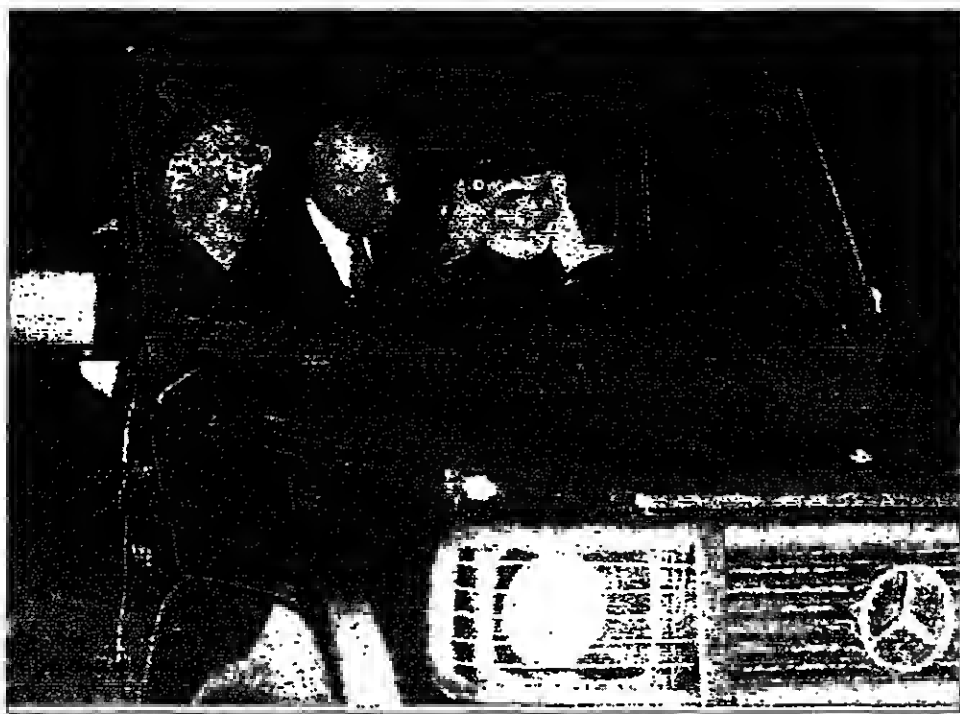
Following his meeting with the King, President Arafat told Jordan Television that his meeting with the U.S. president is the last chance to save the peace process.

"I hope that President Clinton will be able to convince Netanyahu," to move the peace process forward, Mr. Arafat said.

The Palestinian leader asked King Hussein to intensify his efforts to make the upcoming meeting with President Clinton a success.

The Palestinian leader added that he briefed the King on the obstacles the Israelis are creating that impede progress in the peace process and delay the implementation of the agreements signed between the two sides.

Among the thorny issues the Palestinians demand is Israeli army redeployment from rural areas in the West Bank, the safe passage between Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the launching of a seaport and an airport in Gaza.



His Majesty King Hussein drives with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat by his side, Tuesday, on their way to Amman's hilltop Raghadan Palace for talks on the peace process developments. In the back seat is Tayeb Abdul Rahim, secretary general of the Palestinian National Authority (photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Israel said that it will not carry out the second stage of Israeli army withdrawal unless the PNA undertakes tough measures against Palestinian factions that oppose peace with Israel, especially Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

Mr. Khatib denied local newspaper reports that Mr. Arafat would show the King maps which the Palestinians have proposed for Israeli pull-out from the West Bank.

Mr. Arafat who has spoken with King Hussein twice recently, had been scheduled to go to Amman on Sunday but high winds and stormy weather both in Jordan and the West Bank resulted in postponing the trip.

Israel lists its conditions for new troop pullback

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet adopted on Tuesday a long list of preconditions it said must be met by the Palestinians ahead of a promised new troop pullback from the West Bank.

But Palestinian officials immediately rejected the list as a "trick" by the Israeli government to avoid carrying out troop withdrawals required under U.S.-brokered peace accords.

The 12-page document details Palestinian commitments under these agreements which Israel claims have not been honoured, mostly concerning the fight against militants held responsible for anti-Israeli attacks.

It was finalised at one of four special cabinet sessions to draw up Israel's position on the troop withdrawals before Mr. Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat meet separately next week with U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington.

Israel Radio said the list and a timetable for its application would be given to the Palestinians in a few

days and also be presented to Mr. Clinton.

Publicly expressing frustration with the stalled Middle East peace process, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Tuesday that 1998 should be a year of decisions for Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

"We will strive to make this a year in which decisive steps toward a lasting peace are taken," Ms. Albright said in an address to the Centre for National Policy here.

President Bill Clinton "will make that clear" in his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next Tuesday at the White House, she said.

Ms. Albright asserted that the Oslo process that maps out a step-by-step approach to reach a final peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians "is the basis of the peace process."

Washington has been pressing Israel to carry out a quick and significant troop withdrawal from the West Bank and to reaffirm its commitment under a January 1996 agreement to one further pullback by mid-year.

Mr. Netanyahu, whose

government is dominated by right-wing hardliners opposed to further territorial concessions to the Arabs, has said Israel will carry out just one limited West Bank pullback prior to the completion of yet-to-be-begun final peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

And he has said the withdrawal will only come after a five-month delay during which the Palestinians' compliance with Israeli demands will be tested.

"According to the principle of reciprocity... the additional (troop) redeployment is conditioned on the Palestinians' implementation of their commitments" as listed in the document approved Tuesday, Netanyahu's office said.

The list calls on the Palestinians to dismantle armed militant groups opposed to peace, primarily Islamists responsible for the attacks against Israel.

At the same time Israel demands that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) reduce the size of its police, claiming that the security forces have swollen to nearly twice the

(Continued on page 7)

PNA cracks down on Hamas ahead of Clinton meetings

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — The Palestinians launched an offensive against the Islamist group Hamas Tuesday under pressure from Israel for stepped-up cooperation against anti-Israel activists ahead of top-level peace talks in Washington.

Palestinian security forces, working on a tip from Israel, raided a bomb-making factory of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the West Bank town of Nablus on Monday, officials from both sides said.

On Tuesday, Palestinian police arrested 13 Hamas members in pre-dawn raids on homes in the West Bank town of Hebron, Palestinian security sources said.

A high-ranking Israeli intelligence official said the Nablus raid represented "increased security cooperation" and could help push through a stalled security accord which is central to

U.S. efforts to break the deadlock in the peace process.

The action came ahead of a meeting on Jan. 20 between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Bill Clinton and a similar meeting two days later between President Clinton and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

Israel has been on alert in recent days amid warnings of an imminent attack by Hamas in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv or other population centres.

In the raid on the Nablus bomb factory in a basement apartment, the Palestinians uncovered 700 kilograms of explosives and arrested four Hamas members, said Palestinian security sources.

The Palestinians then allowed Israeli intelligence officials and explosive experts to inspect the factory, said the Israeli intelligence official, who asked not to be named.

Almost simultaneously, the head of Israel's Shin Bet intelligence service Ami Ayalon met President Arafat in Ramallah, Israel Radio reported.

Israel learned of the cell from interrogations of Hamas prisoners arrested two weeks ago and supplied the information to the Palestinians, who confirmed it from Hamas members arrested a week ago in Ramallah, the Israeli official said.

In light of the cooperation, the chances "have greatly increased" for winning approval of a security cooperation accord negotiated in December but which Mr. Netanyahu refused to approve.

Mr. Netanyahu overrode his military negotiators and demanded amendments to the accord, while the

(Continued on page 7)

Iraq blocks Ritter's weapons inspection team, Security Council hopes to react on crisis today

Combined agency dispatches

IRAQ BLOCKED a U.N. arms inspection team led by a former U.S. major on Tuesday, reigniting a crisis in which U.S. President Bill Clinton has called for "strong" action from the U.N. Security Council.

"Unfortunately, the government of Iraq has undertaken not to provide government officials to facilitate the inspection," said team leader Scott Ritter, whom Iraq has branded a spy.

"The refusal to provide these officers means we cannot carry out our inspection," he said. "Without these Iraqi officials, we cannot go to the site... We had no choice but to postpone our inspection today."

Mr. Ritter said he informed Richard Butler, chairman of the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) in charge of disarming Iraq, and was awaiting instructions from New York.

Other UNSCOM teams headed out on Tuesday with their Iraqi escorts, as is the standard arrangement, said Alan Dacey of the U.N. arms monitoring centre in Baghdad.

The U.N. Security Council met Tuesday to discuss a reaction to the latest standoff with Iraq hoping to adopt a "firm" reaction to the latest Iraqi defiance on Wednesday. British Ambassador Sir John Weston said Tuesday.

Western diplomats said that during closed-door consultations of the Security Council, U.S. Ambassador Bill Richardson promised to circulate draft proposals for a formal statement to delegations later in the day.

French Ambassador Alain Dejammet, the Security Council president, said that all the 15 Security Council members "reaffirmed their interest for a unanimous reaction to these recent events."

Sir Weston said that "I hope we'll have a firm statement, and we should be in a position to adopt it tomorrow."

The Security Council ambassadors were to meet again later Tuesday to discuss the U.S. draft

proposals.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright warned here Tuesday that the United States did not rule out any option to force Iraq to grant unconditional access to U.N. inspectors.

Ms. Albright also said she discussed the situation in Iraq in a telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov earlier in the day.

"It is absolutely essential that the obligations that are in the Security Council resolutions and that he must come clean as far as the weapons of mass destruction are

(Continued on page 7)

Up to 400 dead in Sidi Hammed massacre — reports

ALGIERS (AFP) — Algerians reeled Tuesday as the full horror of the latest massacre by extremists was brought home, in news reports that as many as 400 people had been slaughtered in the village of Sidi Hammed.

The press reported that another 29 people had also been murdered in separate attacks since Saturday, blamed on Islamists.

There was no escaping the horrifying truth, as the death toll continued to mount in spiralling violence since the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan, Dec. 30.

Le Matin and Al Moudjahid dailies published the unbearable photo of the charred body of a child, its skin burned away to reveal a naked skull.

Page-one news in all dailies, the reports from Sidi Hammed were also broadcast into people's homes on state-run radio and television, as well as by foreign satellite television channels.

"Where is the government?" screamed a headline in Liberte daily, with a picture showing a bulldozer digging graves at Sidi Hammed, located near the capital's Houari Boumediene international airport.

The French-language daily called for action against officials who were unable to deal with security problems. They would face the judgement of "history and the orphans," it said.

Al Khabar headlined the "Hell at Sidi Hammed," while the government daily Al Moudjahid devoted two pages to the mass slaughter.

In a rare move that reflected growing pressure on the Algerian authorities to halt the surge in atrocities, the security forces put out a communiqué Monday detailing their response to the killings in Sidi Hammed.

The communiqué argued that the death toll would have been far higher but for resistance by self-defence groups and the swift intervention of the security



An Algerian woman mourns her family Tuesday at a cemetery in this suburb of Algiers after a Sunday night massacre in which Algerian newspapers report that more than 400 civilians were killed in Sidi Hammed village, 30 km south of Algiers (Reuters photo)

forces after they were alerted.

Saying that the massacre had been carried out by "a terrorist group," the security communiqué said the attack had begun when a

home-made bomb exploded in a cafe in the village. The blast "left several dead and injured."

Survivors said the assailants were "dressed Afghan-style" or in fatigues

like those worn by members of the government-backed self-defence forces. Le Matin and Al Moudjahid said known

(Continued on page 7)

Prosecutor interrogating suspects in attack on Taher — Mutawi

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A Jordanian court prosecutor is interrogating five Iraqis, including women, for alleged involvement in an attack on the Iraqi commercial attaché in the Kingdom, a government spokesman said on Tuesday.

Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi confirmed in reporters that a sixth suspect, who enjoys diplomatic immunity, was also implicated in the Jan. 3 attack on Mr. Rahim Taher, 45.

He said Jordan might press for lifting his immunity to enable his questioning.

Dr. Mutawi declined to give further details but said the man was still at large.

"The sixth person enjoys political immunity. We cannot reveal his identity now, because we want to maintain the objectivity and accuracy of the investigation and because he might not be involved in the attack," he said.

Mr. Taher escaped unharmed when he was fired at from a passing car outside his home in Umm Utheina.

Dr. Mutawi said the attack had no political motives but appeared to have been carried out "for family and financial reasons."

The five suspects held forged Iraqi passports, he said.

The silence-equipped gun used in the attack was also seized.

Dr. Mutawi denied reports that the suspects belonged to one family but said that two of the five detainees were brothers.

He said some of them entered Jordan from Iraq to carry out the assault and others were residents in Amman.

Agence France Presse, quoting judicial sources, identified the suspected organiser of the attack as a former army man

Qasim Mohammed Jarow Al Rajihi.

Dr. Mutawi said Jordan had provided the Iraqi embassy in Amman with the outcome of the investigation.

The mission declined comment on the latest twist in the case.

Iraqi ambassador to Jordan, Nouri Lweiss, last week blamed the attack on parties who opposed improved Jordanian-Iraqi ties and insisted on calling it an assassination attempt.

A judicial source, who requested anonymity, said the case was referred to the Amman Court, not the Higher Criminal Court.

Palestinian prisoners to hold exhibition of children's pictures

BETHLEHEM (AFP) — Palestinian prisoners held by Israel said Tuesday they will plaster their jail with photos of their children in an exhibition inspired by the death of the only son of one of their number.

The 640 Palestinians held in Israel's Nafha prison said in a letter they would hold the "exhibition of prisoners' children" on Jan. 29 for the Eid Al Fitr holiday marking

the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Thousands of children's photos will be posted in cells and common areas of the prison in Israel's southern Negev desert, the prisoners said in a letter to the Bethlehem-based Prisoners' Club, a prisoners' rights group.

The exhibition was inspired by the recent death of Bilal, the only son of Hussein Abu Eid, the letter said.

Bilal was born just before his father's imprisonment seven years ago, and "his father, who lived only on the hope of meeting him one day out of prison, was shocked by the news of his death," the letter said.

The exhibition "will allow the prisoners to look on the faces of their children, who have been deprived of joy during the holiday," it said. The prisoners said they

had gathered funds among them to hand out awards to the "most beautiful" and "most meaningful" photographs.

Israel currently holds over 3,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israel committed to release most of them in 1995 self-rule accords with the Palestinians, but negotiations over their release have been deadlocked.

Turkey, Iraqi Kurd group hold reconciliation talks

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey and a leading Iraqi Kurd group, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), on Tuesday held talks here aimed at mending their ties after the two fought each other in northern Iraq last year.

"We talked about everything that is of interest for the related sides," said Bahram Saleh, who heads the PUK team at the meeting with Turkish foreign ministry officials.

But he told reporters that a peace process with a rival Iraqi Kurd group, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) allied with Turkey, was not discussed at the talks also attended by U.S. and British diplomats.

Turkish army units operating in northern Iraq and war planes cooperated with KDP in repulsing a PUK offensive against the KDP in northern Iraq in October and November.

The PUK then charged

Turkey with launching a major military campaign against it and the faction's ties with Ankara were practically frozen.

But Turkish and PUK sources said before the meeting that the Iraqi Kurd group would seek improved ties with Ankara during the team's visit, the first since the conflict.

Jalal Talabani's PUK and Massud Barzani's KDP have controlled most of northern Iraq in defiance of Baghdad since the 1991 Gulf war.

But their partnership collapsed in 1994 due to rifts on power-sharing and revenue, and more than 3,000 people have been killed in intermittent fighting between the two groups.

Turkey has been allied with the KDP in fighting in northern Iraq since May with the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK). A Turkish Kurd group battling Ankara for an independent Kurdish

homeland.

The PUK launched an offensive against the KDP in October and made significant land gains before Turkish army troops intervened and helped the KDP to push the PUK back to a former ceasefire line.

At the time, the PUK accused the Turkish army and war planes of inflicting heavy losses on its fighters and civilians.

Turkey, although it has never publicly admitted its forces fought the PUK, has charged the group with cooperating with the rebel Turkish Kurds.

At Tuesday's talks Turkish officials were expected to seek to persuade the PUK to resume severed peace talks with the KDP.

Those talks were jointly sponsored by the United States, Turkey and Britain. But the PUK withdrew from that peace process after accusing Turkey of siding with the KDP.

Israel names Lebanese-American held for terrorism

ACRE (AFP) — An Israeli court extended the remand Tuesday of a Lebanese-American from Michigan who was arrested last month on suspicion of working with a Lebanese guerrilla group, officials said.

The suspect was named Tuesday as Bishara Hani Saidi, 35, an electrical engineer of Lebanese descent who has been living in the United States for 12 years. A court order had prevented previous publication of his identity.

Mr. Saidi, a Christian who married an Arab Israeli woman two years ago, was detained by security agents at Tel Aviv's airport on Dec. 25 as he and his wife prepared to fly home after visiting her family in northern Israel.

The Acre court extended his detention on Tuesday for a further eight days.

Prosecutors accused Mr. Saidi of endangering state security and working for a Lebanese "terrorist group" which was not identified.

Mr. Saidi denied the charges, officials said.

His wife Suzanne told the Israeli news agency Ibtam Tuesday that her husband was innocent.

"He doesn't belong to any organisation except for the Catholic Church," she was quoted as saying.

Mr. Saidi's arrest came a month after Israeli police detained a 26-year-old German convert to Islam, Stefan Smyrek, on suspicion of planning to carry out a suicide bombing in Israel for the Lebanese Shiite group Hizbollah.



INSPECTORS RETURN TO BAGHDAD HEADQUARTERS: American Scott Ritter, team leader of the U.N. arms inspectors, and his assistants withdraw back into the heavily-guarded U.N. headquarters in Baghdad Tuesday after waiting for half an hour for Iraqi officials to accompany them on inspections. Iraq on Tuesday effectively halted the work of the U.N. arms team, branding Mr. Ritter as a spy and raising tensions in its latest stand-off with the United States and United Nations over weapons inspections (AFP photo)

Egyptian press slams Arab silence over Algeria massacres

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa on Tuesday denounced the massacres in Algeria, as the press here slammed as "shameful" Arab silence over the bloodshed.

"Egypt is opposed to terrorism and to the crimes which terrify the innocents in Algeria and any other country," Mr. Musa said.

Mr. Musa said Egypt aligned its position to the Arab League, which on Monday sent a special envoy to Algeria with a message of "solidarity."

"The message which the Arab League envoy will carry to Algeria says that all the Arabs are opposed to terrorism and to crimes which terrify the innocents," Mr. Musa said.

Hundreds of Algerians have been massacred since the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan at the end of December, triggering international condemnation and prompting calls for intervention.

But Algeria rejected calls by the United States and the European Union to set up a commission of inquiry, saying that any such initiative would be tantamount to "interference in its internal affairs."

Egypt's government and opposition press meanwhile branded "shameful" the lack of Arab reaction to

the massacres.

"The silence of Arab and Islamic countries towards the massacres in Algeria is shameful," said prominent editorialist Salama Ahmad Salama in government newspaper Al-Ahram.

He also criticised Algeria's refusal of an enquiry commission saying the arguments by Algiers were "insufficient and not convincing. They appear, on the contrary, to conceal a horrible crime."

Islamist bi-weekly opposition newspaper Al-Shaah said "silence over what is happening in Algeria is a crime."

"200,000 victims in Algeria: When will the Arab leaders take action," Al-Shaah said in a banner front-page headline.

"The Arab and Islamic Nation will commit a big sin if it continues to be a mere spectator," Al-Shaah said.

Government daily Al-Akhbar urged the Algerian government to "convene a meeting of the representatives of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the United Nations and the European community to inform them on what is happening."

Lebanese 'honour crime' killer gets four years

BEIRUT (AFP) — A Lebanese man has been sentenced to four years in jail with hard labour for killing his sister five years ago in a so-called "crime of honour," Beirut newspapers reported Tuesday.

Mohammad Said Khaled, 24, was found guilty on Monday of shooting his married sister Fadieh in 1993 in a village in the northern region of Akkar after he found out she was involved in an affair.

The criminal court in the northern city of Tripoli had handed down a sentence of 15 years in jail with hard labour against Khaled before commuting it to four years due to "extenuating circumstances."

Article 562 of the penal

code, against which feminist and rights groups are challenging, allows the judge to consider "extenuating circumstances" if the murderer proves that he killed his wife, mother, daughter or sister to "cleanse" his family's honour.

Crimes of honour have become rare in Lebanon, but a few cases are still reported in the remote, deprived northern regions of Akkar and Hermel as well as in the eastern region of Baalbek.

In such cases where a woman has been accused of "dishonouring" her family, her relatives meet in a family council which hands down a sentence.

UAE seizes 600 kilos of hashish

DUBAI (AFP) — Police in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) seized 600 kilograms of hashish from two separate operations, Mr. Fardan said, adding those drugs came from Oman and involved Iranian smugglers.

Total drugs seized in Sharjah last year amounted to 1.2 tonnes of hashish, 748 grammes of heroin, 381 grammes of opium and 1,618 narcotic pills.

Sharjah is the third biggest member of the oil-rich UAE, which joined Saudi Arabia two years ago in enforcing the death punishment against drug dealers following a surge in trafficking.

in Sharjah in 1997, when around 492 kilograms of hashish were also seized in two separate operations, Mr. Fardan said, adding those drugs came from Oman and involved Iranian smugglers.

The drugs were husted in Sharjah in late December after the two smugglers tried to sell part of it to a police decoy, anti-drug squad chief Abdul Rahman Al Fardan said, quoted in Al-Bayan.

The two brought the drugs from Pakistan in a boat and concealed them in orange crates at an apartment in the emirate, he said.

It was the biggest drug haul

Jailed Gamaa founders urge lawyer not to quit, renew ceasefire call

CAIRO (AFP) — The jailed leaders of Egypt's main armed Islamist group, Gamaa Islamiyah, on Monday urged the movement's main lawyer not to quit and renewed a call for an end to the violence.

The appeal came a week after lawyer Muntasser Zayat said he would no longer defend Islamist activists because he had "failed" to achieve a halt to the violence.

"We were surprised by the decision taken by Muntasser Zayat to quit and urge him to pursue his noble message so that his efforts could be crowned," said a statement faxed to AFP.

"We appeal to the leaders abroad... and expect from everyone inside and outside [Egypt], leaders and members, to accept the wise and brave initiative" launched

in July calling for a halt to the violence, it said.

"In the interest of Islam and the nation and on behalf of tens of thousands of Gamaa and Islamic movement members and the hundreds killed, both Gamaa and others, we appeal to the leaders abroad to issue a clear statement for an end to military activity," the statement said.

The hand-written Arabic statement was signed on behalf of the "Gamaa Islamiyah leaders" jailed at the Tora high security prison by Mamduh Ali Youssef, Safwat Abdulghani and Dia Eddin Farouk.

The three men are serving time after being accused of involvement in the October 1990 assassination of former Egyptian Parliament Speaker Rifat Mahjub.

The Gamaa's six founding members in July issued an initial statement from their prison cells calling for a halt to the violence which has shaken Egypt since 1992.

But the Gamaa claimed responsibility for several subsequent attacks, including the massacre of 58 tourists and four Egyptians outside an ancient temple in the southern resort of Luxor on Nov. 17.

Deep rifts have emerged between Gamaa leaders and armed activists in Egypt and abroad since the massacre.

On Jan. 6 Zayat said he decided to retire from public activity because he had "failed in my mission to halt the violence and the bloodshed."

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:10Johnny Quest
14:30French Programmes
16:15Prayers
16:30Believe and Behave
17:00Border Town
17:30The Finder
18:00Neighbours
18:30News Headlines
18:35Step By Step
19:00Le Journal
19:15Ramadan Talks
19:35Nature of Healing
20:00The Upper Hand
20:30Challenges
21:10Kung Fu
22:00News in English
22:30A Woman of Independent Means
23:15Country Music
23:59Islam in a Changing World

PRAYER TIMES

05:11Fajr
06:32(Sunrise)Doha
11:45Dhuhr
14:33Asr
16:57Maghreb
18:18Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifeth, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826.
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 5516245
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932.
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

Dr. Khalil Al Tustaq357253
Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi895542
Dr. Nasser Ibrahim830432
Dr. Bahjat Bader832642
Firas pharmacy661912
Ferdows pharmacy890280
Al Asena pharmacy637055
Al Salam pharmacy636730
Yacoub pharmacy644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Nalroukh pharmacy623672
Najib pharmacy847632
IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu281484
Al Quds pharmacy(—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Walid Nabhan995743
Khalifeh pharmacy985417

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Frequent rise in temperatures is expected today with skies partly cloudy and winds north-westerly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be warm and sunny, winds northerly moderate and seas calm.
Amman01/10

Aqaba06/19
Desertszero/12
Jordao Valley05/17
Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 07, Aqaba 17
Humidity readings: Amman 95 per cent, Aqaba 50 per cent.

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Najib pharmacy847632
IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu281484
Al Quds pharmacy(—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Walid Nabhan995743
Khalifeh pharmacy985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade617101
Blood Bank775121
Highway Police843402
Traffic Police896390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints605800
Price Complaints661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints897467
Amman Municipality Complaints787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television773111
Radio Jordan774111
Water Authority680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381
RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

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ZARQA:
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Khalifeh pharmacy985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111

813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, 644281/6
Akileh Maternity, 64241/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 607071
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 66727/9
The Islamic, Abdali 666126/37
At-Ahli, Abdali664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir,775111/26
Army, Marka891611/15
Queo Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital,674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery865199
ZARQA:
Zarqa Gvt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafes Hospital (02)247100
AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

Dr. Khalil Al Tustaq357253
Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi895542
Dr. Nasser Ibrahim830432
Dr. Bahjat Bader832642
Firas pharmacy661912
Ferdows pharmacy890280
Al Asena pharmacy637055
Al Salam pharmacy636730
Yacoub pharmacy644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Nalroukh pharmacy623672
Najib pharmacy847632
IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu281484
Al Quds pharmacy(—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Walid Nabhan995743
Khalifeh pharmacy985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport. Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44(53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:25Dantasec (RJ)
08:05Larnaca (RJ)
08:35Jeddah (RJ)
08:50Doha, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
15:00New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
18:10London, Berlin (RJ)
18:20Frankfurt, Istanbul (RJ)
18:45Paris, Brussels (RJ)
19:45Rome (RJ)
23:10Beirut (RJ)
00:05Cairo (RJ)
02:30Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

00:35Amsterdam (KL)
01:55Bucharest (RO)
06:35Larnaca (CY)
08:00Beirut (MEI)
08:25London (BA)
10:30Cairo (MS)
10:30At 'Arish (Marka Airpon) (PF)
11:15Al Hudaidah, Aden (IY)
12:00Kuwait (KU)
12:00Jeddah (SV)
14:10Tunis (TU)
14:20Sharjah (AH)
15:15Bahrain, Muscat (GF)
15:10Tel Aviv (LY)
15:30Doha (QRI)
15:50Vienna (OS)
19:30Abu Dhabi, Karachi (PK)
23:55Damascus, Paris (AF)

DEPARTURES

Royal Wings (RW)
07:45Aqaba (RW)
09:05Amman (QAIA) (RW)
09:50Amman (Marka Airpon) (RW)
17:30Tel Aviv (RW)
18:30Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:20Aqaba (RW)
22:50Amman (Marka Airpon) (RW)
08:25Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
10:00Istanbul, Rome (RJ)
10:40Berlin, London (RJ)
19:30Columbo (RJ)
19:35Beirut (RJ)
20:05Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)
20:10Cairo (RJ)
20:15Bombay (RJ)
20:15Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
20:30New Delhi (RJ)
21:00Calcutta, Bangkok (RJ)

Other Flights

00:35Amsterdam (KL)
01:55Bucharest (RO)
06:35Larnaca (CY)
08:00Beirut (MEI)
08:25London (BA)
10:30Cairo (MS)
10:30At 'Arish (Marka Airpon) (PF)
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DEPARTURES

Royal Wings (RW)
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08:15Aqaba (RW)
09:30Amman (QAIA) (RW)
16:45Amman (Marka Airpon) (RW)
17:55Tel Aviv (RW)
20:30Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50Aqaba (RW)

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Cabinet hears reports on aftermath of snowstorm, French FM's visit

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Cabinet met in a regular session Tuesday and heard a report on the general conditions in the country in the wake of the snowstorm that affected most regions of Jordan.

Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, who chaired the meeting, reported to the ministers about his inspection tour of the different areas of Amman and the Ministry of Interior's emergency measures. He noted that apart from a number of road accidents resulting in slight injuries, the situation was reassuring.

At the meeting, Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh reported on the visit by French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine to Amman on Monday and his talks with the government.

His Majesty King Hussein and HRH Crown Prince Hassan met with the French Minister to review the Middle East situation, the deadlocked peace process, and Jordanian-French relations.

Mr. Vedrine and Minister of Planning Rima Khalaf signed an agreement to make \$13.1 million in soft loans available to Jordan, repayable over 22 years with a seven-year grace period.

Dr. Tarawneh told the Council of Ministers that the head of the European Commission and the foreign minister of Sweden will soon pay visits to Jordan.

After the meeting, Minister of State for Information

Affairs Samir Mutawi fielded a question on Jordan's stand vis-à-vis Jewish settlements, saying that "we are against settlements of all kinds as they do not help the cause of the peace process."

When asked about Jordan's views concerning the ongoing massacres in Algeria, Dr. Mutawi expressed the Kingdom's regret and pain over what has been happening in the Arab country. He expressed hope that the international community in general and Arab states in particular will extend a helping hand to Algeria to help it overcome the present plight.

In response to a question on U.S. aid to Jordan, Dr. Mutawi said "the U.S. is keen on providing aid to Jordan to help it

carry out economic reforms."

He noted that the foreign and planning ministers will soon visit Washington to discuss this aid, which he said would also help the Kingdom carry out its social security package plan in the coming years.

The Council of Ministers formed a delegation headed by Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji to take part in the annual conference of directors of tourism, in which 300 delegates representing 17 countries will participate. Mr. Biltaji said the meeting will be held in the Israeli port city of Eilat, and the delegates will also pay a visit to Aqaba and tourist sites in Jordan.

Proposed press law amendments divide association members

By Alla Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The members of the Jordanian Press Association (JPA) council are in disagreement over the association's proposed amendments to the temporary Press and Publications Law that JPA President Seif Sharif recently sent to Parliament.

One council member told the Jordan Times on Tuesday that not all members agreed to all the proposals, and that the amendments were written in a manner that only addresses the interests of certain parties.

"We have been against the temporary law from the beginning, but are also against the proposed amendments of several articles by the council," said a council member, who preferred to remain anonymous.

He added that there was initial approval of several articles. "However, several additions to the amendments were made without the knowledge of council members, who are now calling for a revision of these articles."

Mr. Sharif, however, insisted that a consensus was reached on the suggested amendments during the council's last meeting on Sunday.

The proposed association amendments were initially made some time after the new temporary law was passed in May.

"The proposals are old but have been frozen since July when Prime Minister (Abdul Salam) Majali asked for proposals in order to open a dialogue on the issue," Mr. Sharif said.

"The proposals were studied carefully and written in a clear

and balanced way and sent in the shape of a letter directed to Lower House Speaker Sa'd Hazeel Srou, as well as Lower House members, in a bid to help open debate and come up with the best results," Mr. Sharif added.

Fakhr Abu Hamdeh, another member of the JPA council, said the proposed amendments were meant to open discussion with the government and inform the Lower House of the association's stand on the law.

In the four-page letter submitted to the Lower House, the JPA said it had approved most of the articles in the temporary press law, with the exception of five.

The main focus of the JPA paper was two controversial articles that specify requirements for capital and the chief editor's experience. These two articles have caused the most friction between the government and the press.

One article of the law demands that a chief editor be a full-time, totally dedicated journalist, with a minimum of 10 years of experience. The association recommended lowering the period to five years.

On capital, the association proposed raising daily newspapers' capital requirements to JD1 million from the JD600,000 set in the temporary law, and reducing weekly newspapers' capital from JD500,000 in the law to JD100,000.

"We propose that the capital be registered one and not fully paid, as the government had requested from all the weeklies that were shut down because they could not raise their capital," said Mr. Abu Hamdeh.

The JPA also proposed that the final version of the law retain

a provision from the old 1993 law that limits government ownership in the dailies to 30 percent. The government owns 62 percent of Al Ra'i and 32 percent of Al Dustour newspapers.

The JPA also asked that the Press and Publications Law not be applied retroactively, and that all rights acquired before the law was introduced on May 15, 1997, be restored. This includes restoration of all 13 weeklies that were shut down and the reinstatement of Nabil Sharif, who did not meet with the 10-year experience requirement as chief editor of Al Dustour daily.

However, Article 40, the article which includes all the prohibitions in the law and which was rejected by most journalists, was passed by the JPA with ten provisions.

The article prohibits the publication of material offensive to the Royal Family, information about the Jordanian armed and security forces, articles that offend the dignity of persons or individuals, reports or articles, offensive to public morals and ethics, reports that instigate crime or damage national unity, and articles that "harm the national currency."

The JPA, however, proposed that the House reduce fines for violating this article, set at JD15,000-25,000 in the new laws to JD5,000-15,000.

"We intend to discuss each item with Lower House members, with the goal of reaching an amicable solution through compromise on all articles," Mr. Sharif said.

The council approved of the other nine, which they described as mere "formalities" that did not need any change.

Warmer weather forecast

AMMAN (J.T.) — After the snowstorm and the rain, Jordan will enjoy slightly warmer weather in the coming few days, with temperatures rising gradually and with sunny to partly cloudy skies, according to the Department of Meteorology on Tuesday.

A spokesperson said temperatures for Wednesday are forecast to reach a high of 10° C and a low of 0° C. No low pressure cells should affect the region for at least the next four days, but frost formation and fog are expected, especially in the hilly regions of the country, he added.

The rain has replenished the country's reservoirs, which irrigate the Jordan Valley region in the dry summer season.

According to Dureid Mahasneh, secretary general of the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA), the King Talal Dam now has collected 57.3 million cubic metres (mcm) of water out of a total storage capacity of 75 mcm.

Sharhabeel Dam, 2.6 mcm out of a capacity of 3.9 mcm, Al Arab Dam, 10.4 mcm out of a capacity of 17.1 mcm, Shueib Dam, 829,000 cubic metres out of a capacity of 1.4 mcm, Karameh Dam, 16.4 mcm out of a capacity of 55 million, and Kafra, 1.23 mcm out of a total of 8.425 mcm.

Dr. Mahasneh's deputy, Thafar Alem, told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that the water collected behind the dams will have a very beneficial effect on underground aquifers and will help farms in the Jordan Valley increase food production.

Fire engulfs building in Zarqa; five firefighters slightly injured

AMMAN (J.T.) — A fire engulfed a fuel and spare parts depot in Zarqa Tuesday, resulting in the slight injury of five local civil defence officers, including the director of the Civil Defence Department.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra, said firefighters from Amman and Zarqa, as well as the Armed Forces, the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company, and the Zarqa municipality, took part in the three-hour effort to put out the fire, which caused extensive damage to the store and completely burnt out its contents, mostly inflammable substances.

Zarqa Civil Defence Director Abdullah Huneiti, who had his right hand injured during the operation, was quoted by the news agency as saying that the four other civil defence men suffered minor injuries only. The store, located in the middle of a densely populated district of the city, was set up on a 500 square metre area and was filled with different



Firefighters Tuesday gather equipment after extinguishing a blaze at a store in Zarqa. Five people were slightly injured while fighting the fire (Photo courtesy of the Civil Defence Department)

kinds of oil and spare auto parts in a disorganised manner, he said. Firefighters had to struggle to prevent the fire from extending to neighbouring buildings and a nearby gas station, Col. Huneiti added.

Fayez, Zarqa deputy governor, the store owners violated several laws by setting up the store in the midst of residential areas without informing the concerned authorities about the type of materials it contained.

Minister of Interior Nathir Rashid and CDD Director Theeb Maani supervised the firefighting operations and set up a special committee to determine the cause of the fire and the estimated losses.

Jordanian-Palestinian committee concludes meeting with agreement on goods transport

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordanian-Palestinian Joint Transport Committee has ended a meeting in Amman, during which a number of arrangements connected with the transportation of goods between Palestine and Jordan were finalised.

In a statement released Tuesday, the committee said its members discussed and came to an agreement on procedures pertaining to loading and unloading goods, the establishment of storage and customs centres at the Jordan River

bridges, and the clearing process on these goods.

The committee also agreed on a timetable for operating the Jordanian-Palestinian trucks, working hours for the centres at the bridges, and other relevant topics.

The meetings were a follow-up to discussions held by officials from Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in the West Bank town of Ramallah late last month, according to the committee statement.

Telecommunications Basam Saket met with the committee members and stated that Jordan was keen on promoting and strengthening Jordanian-Palestinian relations.

Meanwhile, the Department of Palestinian Affairs in Amman on Tuesday issued its December report summing up the various political and economic activities in the Palestinian territories and Jordanian-Palestinian meetings. The report highlighted the Ramallah meeting on Dec. 2, which was attended by

Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and PNA President Yasser Arafat.

The report reviewed the latest developments in Palestinian-Israeli relations and the series of meetings by the two sides. The report also reviewed the department's services to the refugee camps in Jordan, the Kingdom's participation in a meeting in Cairo by Arab countries hosting refugees, and the efforts by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to raise funds for its 1998 fiscal budget.

Tree planting ceremony marking Arbor Day to be held at university

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan will celebrate Arbor Day on Thursday, Jan. 15 by holding a tree planting ceremony under Royal patronage on the grounds of Balqa Applied Sciences University in Salt, Minister of Agriculture Mijhem Khreisha said Tuesday.

The minister said a total of 500 dunums of land around the university will be planted with approximately 50,000 fruit and forest tree saplings.

At the ceremony, several directors of agricultural departments, a number of

international organisations, and local institutions concerned with growing trees will be honoured, according to Mr. Khreisha. It is hoped, said the minister, that the annual event will mobilise Jordanian society to plant trees as a national duty towards greening the Kingdom.

Meanwhile, Hashem Shboul, the ministry's secretary general, Tuesday inspected the site of the ceremony and the preparations under way for the tree planting event.

ceremony will mark the start of an intensive tree planting campaign throughout the Kingdom by public and private organisations.

At least eight million tree saplings of all types have been produced for this year's agricultural season, half of which will be planted in the range, forestation areas, and pasture lands, while the rest will be distributed free of charge to various organisations, farmers, and individuals, according to Mousa Abbadi, the direc-

tor of the range and forestation department.

A total of 20,000 dunums of land will be planted with forest trees during the current season, he added.

Mr. Abbadi said the area of land cultivated with forest trees now stands at 1,309 million dunums. Referring to the main Arbor Day ceremony, Mr. Abbadi said the nominees for this year's honours will be presented with Royal medals in recognition of their efforts to promote the greening of Jordan.

WHAT'S GOING ON

FRENCH COMEDY CINEMA

* Five French comedy films (lentils Tango, La totale, La Crise, La Vengeance d'une blonde, and Fanfane avec chauffeur) will be screened in this order at Philadelphia Cinema at 8:30 p.m. effective Jan. 15.

FILM

* Children's film "Lord Jim" at the British Council, Jabbal Amman at 5:00 p.m.

CONCERT

* Musical performance by Ayman Taysir at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

SECOND PLASTIC ART WEEK

* Abstract (plastic) art by several artists at the Royal Cultural Centre, until Jan. 17.

* Film on renowned British artist Henry More at the Royal Cultural Centre at 7:00 p.m.

* Lecture on the relationship between plastic art and architecture by Architect Muhammad Al Daghlies at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

Activist's summons on slander charges highlights issue of pollution in Fuheis

By Lola M. Keilni
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The prosecutor general has summoned a prominent environmental activist on slander charges after he wrote an article on air pollution allegedly caused by the cement factory in the residential city of Fuheis.

His case has highlighted the controversial issue of pollution in Fuheis — a tug-of-war for years between desperate residents and the factory, which had spent millions of dollars to become environmentally friendly.

Issa Abu Dayyeh, a businessman from Fuheis, even sent a fax to the international environmental watchdog Greenpeace to push his case.

He has sent an open invitation to come to Fuheis and see how winter snows turn into "black snows" hours after it blankets the nearby hills, reflecting the alleged pollution by the decades-old firm.

His claim, however, contradicted findings by the Royal Scientific Society (RSS), which carried out a field study

to monitor the levels of air pollution in Fuheis.

"The study showed that pollution exceeded the specified value only twice during a three month period," the study said.

Ongoing RSS comparative studies have been based on monitoring three stations, located in the Marj Al Hamam area, 10 km south-west of Amman, in Fuheis, 15 km west of Amman, and in the Hashimiya Palace area, three km from Fuheis.

The findings of each three-month period have confirmed that no pollution was detected according to Jordanian specifications for the Hashimiya Palace area, the study said.

But the two other stations registered two violations during the three-month period from July to September 1997, it added.

"The cement factory could be held accountable if violations occur three times a month," said Hussein Shahin, director of the air project at the General Corporation for the Environment Protection (GCEP).

Mr. Shahin, an engineer, said that because the factory is "a source of national economic pride," one has to be careful before "issuing any condemnation, especially since we have to review the annual report, which reflects the situation during the last four seasons."

He added that the latest study, which was financed by the GCEP at a cost of JD40,000, aims at ascertaining the level of air and gas pollution in the Fuheis area caused by the cement factory.

The factory has gone out of its way to explain its case. Hamdi Tabaa, chairman of the factory's board of directors, said the factory spent JD30,000,000 for "new state of the art" equipment that is environmentally friendly. He added that according to a Swiss consulting firm, the factory's refuse was equivalent to that accepted by international standards.

Mr. Shahin explained that since the pollution reached Marj Al Hamam, which is far from the factory, then other considerations should be

taken into account.

"On those special days, we study the direction of the wind. If it is blowing towards the west, then the pollution at the Marj Al Hamam area, which is to the southeast of Fuheis, would be due to other factors rather than fine cement dust going into the air. In that case, the pollution would be due to other conditions."

But the residents of Fuheis are sceptical of the study's findings.

Mr. Abu Dayyeh said official spokesmen have always used the pretext of weather condition to excuse the factory.

He added that the RSS technology used in their test stations is outdated and cannot be accurate.

Alida Mada'in, from the Environment Protection Association, Fuheis branch, said she no longer believed in these official studies.

"Pollution is obvious in the city and the residents suffer from asthma," she said.

The GCEP agreement to fund the RSS study stated that

"a lot of air pollutants are the result [of gases emitted from] fuel incineration [used in] the process of refining oil at the Hashimiya district."

It added that "residents in the area have been complaining of deterioration in air quality, which forced many of them to move to other areas. They ascribe their health damage to inhaling air pollutants and tiny micro-sized dust cement particles over a long period. Those hazards affect many children, elderly people, and others who suffer from allergies, chest pains, and asthma."

Those dust particles are referred to by environmentalists as PM10. They are invisible to the naked eye but can be detected by the equipment the RSS uses.

"The PM10 particles are dangerous due to their small size. Upon inhalation, they stick in the lungs, causing respiratory problems in the first phase and serious problems at a later stage," a specialist physician said.

"Most of the cases that arrive at the health centre are

due to severe asthma," said an employee at the Fuheis Health Centre.

In order to reach their goals, the GCEP signed an agreement with the RSS stipulating the installation of three pollution detection stations. The third station, located at Hashimiya Palace, contains a computerised sensor that can detect pollution, including gases such as sulphate dioxide, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen oxide.

"Due to financial constraints, we could only afford three stations," said Mr. Shahin. "This year we intend to install two extra stations."

The study also showed that air pollution in the areas went down from July to September 1997 compared to January to June of the same year. In the first six months of last year, five violations were detected at the Fuheis station, three at Marj Al Hamam, and one at Hashimiya.

"I believe that the pollution was due to weather conditions," said Mr. Shahin. "During April and May, we have strong winds, while during

July and August the weather is relatively hot with no winds."

Due to pressure from Fuheis residents, who staged a demonstration opposite the cement factory last year, the factory has installed new filters and bought new sensors that continually monitor the level of air pollution. Mr. Shahin said that in order to ensure accuracy, the GCEP reads the computer chart detailing pollution at the factory.

Next February, environmental activists are planning to stage a sit-in opposite the cement factory to back their demands for more filters, purifiers, and environmentally-friendly equipment, said Mr. Abu Dayyeh.

The sit-in comes at a time when the cement factory is negotiating multi-million dollar contracts to supply European contractors with cement when the EU decision to ban cement production in Europe goes into effect. The EU decision was taken due to the health hazards created by the production process.

Canadian woman named U.N. deputy chief

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — Canadian Deputy Defence Minister Louise Frechette Monday was appointed the first deputy secretary-general of the United Nations.

With Ms. Frechette at his side, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced at a news briefing that the 51-year old Francophone from Montreal would become the most senior woman in the U.N. system.

Ms. Frechette said she accepted the new post because she was "a great believer in the United Nations," which she considered "an indispensable organisation."

But she added that she was also taking up the post "out of admiration and respect" for Mr. Annan and his staff.

Mr. Annan plumped for the Canadian official, a former U.N. ambassador, following consultations with the heads of U.N. regional groups after the U.N. General Assembly approved creation of the

post on Dec. 19.

"I was looking for the best person for the job, and it happens to be a woman," Mr. Annan said Monday.

Mr. Annan, a 59-year old Ghanaian, had made it clear that he favoured a woman from an industrialised country for the post, which will complete his management restructuring as part of his wider reform effort.

But he was turned down by former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and U.N. High Commissioner Sadako Ogata of Japan.

In Ottawa, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said he welcomed the appointment of "an experienced diplomat" to a position that is "good for the U.N."

Ms. Frechette is a friend of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, with whom she formed a women's network while both were ambassadors to the United Nations.

While at the United Nations from January 1992 to November 1994, Ms.

Frechette was active in U.N. peacekeeping, a department headed at the time by Mr. Annan, who took over as U.N. chief in January last year.

As deputy U.N. chief, she will earn \$210,000 a year and have an annual expense allowance of \$15,000. She is set to serve until Mr. Annan's term expires in three years.

Developing countries at the United Nations, particularly China, resisted the post's creation, fearing that it would mean an extra layer of U.S. surveillance looking over Mr. Annan's shoulder.

A diplomat who played a leading role in the negotiations said that as a result, the post's definition "has been weakened to coffee maker."

But other diplomats pointed out that the language in the resolution enshrining the position was sufficiently imprecise to give Ms. Frechette plenty of room to manoeuvre.

"The job will be what she and Kofi Annan decide to

make of it," said one Western diplomat.

The U.N. deputy will be an "integral part" of Mr. Annan's office, and is to replace him during his absence as well as represent him at official functions.

But Chinese Ambassador Qin Huan stressed last month, after weeks of arduous negotiations, that the deputy will not report to the U.N. General Assembly and U.N. Security Council, and is not to constitute "a separate decision-making layer."

Some top U.N. officials also resisted the post, fearing a dilution of their power, according to diplomats. "Is she going to get cooperation from the big ones?" one diplomat asked.

Juan Somavia, the Chilean ambassador who knew Ms. Frechette during her time here said: "It's a great appointment, which is very well received in U.N. circles. She has the personality, experience and energy needed. And she'll need lots of energy."

U.N. war crimes court to try Bosnian Croat

THE HAGUE (AFP) — The U.N. war crimes court Wednesday will begin its fifth trial of a soldier in the Yugoslav conflict, this time a Bosnian Croat trying to appeal a 10-year jail term on charges of shooting dead dozens of Muslims.

The defendant, Drazen Erdemovic, was the first person to receive a sentence from the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for his part in the 1991-1995 Balkans conflict.

A former member of the Bosnian Serb army, Mr. Erdemovic admitted during a hearing last year to shooting dead dozens of Muslims rounded up after the fall of the Srebrenica enclave in 1995. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison, but has chosen to appeal in a case scheduled to start on Jan. 14.

Mr. Erdemovic is also one of the few to hand himself into The Hague-based tribunal, which was founded by the U.N. Security Council in May 1993 in order to judge warcrimes during the war in the former Yugoslavia.

At present 74 people — including over 50 Bosnian Serbs — are on the list of indicted persons published by the ICTY. They are charged variously with violations of the Geneva Convention, crimes against humanity and genocide. Nineteen of those on the current published list of indictments are held in the Scheveningen prison near The Hague, the majority of whom have surrendered themselves to the court.

The last group to do so were 10 Bosnian Croats implicated in a series of atrocities carried out by the Bosnian Croat HVO militia during Muslim-Croat fighting in 1993. They surrendered to the court last year following intense diplomatic pressure on Zagreb, the HVO's main sponsor.

Among the detainees are also three people arrested in special NATO snatch operations carried out in Bosnia during 1997. A fourth warcrimes suspect, Slavko Dokmanovic, was arrested in Croatia last year by ICTY agents.

Mr. Dokmanovic is charged with complicity in the biggest single massacre of the 1991 war in Croatia, that of the execution of 261 people forcibly taken out of a hospital in Vukovar, eastern Croatia. His trial starts on Jan. 19.

To date, the tribunal has only tried and sentenced one warcrimes suspect, Dusan "Dusko" Tadic, a former Bosnian Serb camp guard.

Mr. Tadic was found guilty on 11 counts of war crimes committed in 1992 at a detention camp for Muslims in northern Bosnia and sentenced to 20 years in prison on May 7, 1997. He is appealing his sentence.

There are currently three ongoing trials at the tribunal which has to stagger its hearings because it has only one court room, though others are planned for construction.

One of these is against the former HVO commander, Tihomir Blaskic, who is charged with the expulsion of thousands of Muslims from central Bosnia's Lasva Valley in 1993 and atrocities against civilians and prisoners used as human shields. His trial began in June 1997.

Also on trial since March 1997 for murder, torture and rape are the so-called "Celebici Four" — members of Bosnia's mainly Muslim army who were guards at a detention camp for Serbs in Celebici central Bosnia during 1992.

The most recent trial to begin was that of Zlatko Aleksovski, a former officer in the HVO. He first appeared in court on Jan. 6 and is charged with crimes

against humanity for his alleged mistreatment of Muslim prisoners in central Bosnia during Muslim-Croat fighting in 1993.

Despite pledges in the Dayton Peace accords which ended Bosnia's conflict in 1995, the Bosnian Serb authorities have yet to hand over any of those indicted living in territory they control.

Those still at liberty include Radovan Karadzic, the wartime Bosnian Serb leader and his military commander Ratko Mladic. Both men have been twice indicted for genocide of Muslims on account of the Serb siege of Sarajevo and mass execution of Muslims after Serb forces seized the Srebrenica enclave. Mr. Mladic and Mr. Karadzic are also held jointly responsible for the mass expulsions of non-Serbs from territory in Bosnia their forces controlled between 1992 and 1995 and are believed to be in the Serb-run half of Bosnia.

Late last year three Bosnian Croats indicted by the tribunal and held in custody were freed due to lack of evidence. The trio, all members of the HVO, had been accused of participating in series of killings in the Lasva Valley. A fourth man charged alongside them, was taken off the indicted list after it was discovered he had died in a Dutch prison in 1995.

Two others indicted by the court have also died. One was a former Bosnian Serb police chief who was killed when he fired on NATO troops trying to arrest him in July 1997. A former Bosnian Serb General, Djordje Djukic, arrested by Sarajevo authorities in 1995, died of cancer in May 1996.

In addition to the published list, the ICTY has lately begun to indict suspects secretly to facilitate arrests.

Australians can't keep their hands off supermodel

MELBOURNE, Australia (AFP) — Australian fans of supermodel Elle MacPherson can't seem to keep their hands off her. After only three months in a Melbourne display, Madame Tussaud's has been forced to give MacPherson a much-needed holiday and wash because fans couldn't keep their hands off a wax replica of the Australian supermodel, the wax museum said Tuesday.

"She was taken out two days ago for repairs, but she's back tomorrow," said Vicky Brown, general manager of Madame Tussauds Australia.

Since the exhibition opened in October, thousands have posed with Elle for souvenir pictures, rubbing off her skin colouring, scratching her arms and leaving a greasy residue on her scant clothing.

A maintenance team was stripping back the replica's skin colouring, repairing scratches on her arms, reapplying paint, giving her hair a wash, and dry cleaning the skirt and blouse she wears, Ms. Brown said.

The model was the most popular item in the exhibition and popular with both sexes, Ms. Brown said.

"Obviously the guys love her but the girls egg on their boyfriends to have their pictures taken with her," she said.

MacPherson's replica and the rest of the wax celebrities in the exhibition leave Melbourne at the end of February to tour Southeast Asia.



Demonstrators symbolising death take part in a demonstration in Mexico City, marking a national day of protest to condemn the massacre of 45 people in Chiapas on Dec. 22 and to urge President Ernesto Zedillo to forge peace in Chiapas (Reuters photo)

One dead, two hurt as Mexican rebels seek worldwide support

SAN CRISTOBAL, Mexico (AFP) — Protesters in Mexico to demand that the perpetrators of a pre-Christmas massacre be punished resulted in more bloodshed Monday when police in one village fired on demonstrators.

The shooting occurred in the impoverished Chiapas town of Ocosingo after about 500 demonstrators threw stones at police. One man was reported killed and two other people were injured, authorities said.

The dead man was identified as a Guadalupe Mendez Lopez, 35. His daughter, whom he was carrying in his arms, was one of the wounded.

In Mexico City, tens of thousands of demonstrators marched to the capital's central square Monday to demand a thorough probe of the Dec. 22 slaughter of 45 peasants in the tiny Chiapas town of Acteal.

There have been dozens of arrests in connection with the case, including a town mayor, but Mexicans remain sceptical that all of the killers have been caught.

There is widespread suspicion that armed "paramilitary groups" — linked to the Institutional

Revolutionary Party (PRI) that has ruled Mexico since 1929 — were behind the killing.

The town where the shooting occurred Monday, Ocosingo, was the site of the worst fighting in the opening days of the Zapatista National Liberation Army uprising four years ago this month.

Ocosingo and Altamirano, where many of the protesters were from, are believed to be strongholds of the Zapatistas, who have spent the last four years penned into a patch of jungle near the border with Guatemala.

Late Monday, demonstrations and sit-ins were reported across Mexico.

In the capital, demonstrators carried black and white coffins and shouted "assassins, assassins" and "enough already" as they marched some six kilometres through city streets.

Some wore black bands and carried candles in support of the victims in Acteal, most of whom were unarmed women and children.

Other marches and sit-ins reportedly took place in Villahermosa, Cuidad

Juarez and Durango, in Veracruz and Ciudad Altamirano, sit-ins involving hundreds of people began Sunday.

In central Rome, Italian supporters of the Zapatistas occupied the Mexican tourism office for several hours Monday to protest the massacre.

Meanwhile, in an appeal published Monday in Mexican newspapers, hundreds of humanitarian groups and activists from 15 countries urged the federal government to hold peace talks with the Chiapas rebels.

Late Sunday, the civilian and religious group that brought the government and the Zapatistas to the bargaining table last year presented a 16-point proposal to rekindle stalled peace talks.

Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo named a new envoy to Chiapas, Emilio Rabassa Gamboa, Monday as part of a generalised shake-up of a peace commission. The changes had been ordered by Interior Minister Francisco Labastida, who himself was named in a post-massacre cabinet shuffle.

Australian researcher claims sign of victory in skin cancer battle

SYDNEY (AFP) — A reduced incidence of the most common skin cancer among young Australians shows educational programmes to urge reduced exposure to the sun have worked, a leading dermatologist said Tuesday.

According to findings released by dermatologist Robin Marks, Australians aged 25 to 30 showed a 30 per cent decrease in the incidence of non-melanocytic skin cancer between 1990 and 1995.

That finding shows "the message is finally being heeded by the younger age groups and their parents," Dr. Marks said.

However, those in the 65 to 70 age group, who grew up when the golden tan ruled and sun protection messages were not widespread, showed an increase of 33 per cent in the rate of cancers in the

five-year period, according to Dr. Marks.

Dr. Marks said studies of the incidence of skin cancer among migrants from overseas compared to Australian-born residents showed the importance of protecting young children from the sun.

"The rate of skin cancer in northern Australia is far higher than the rate in people who have migrated from Britain after their childhood," he said.

The further north you went in Australia, the higher the rate of skin cancer, which correlates very well with the amount of radiation.

One alarming finding, Dr. Marks said, was that while rates of non-melanoma skin cancer were decreasing overall in the young, more young women were being diagnosed with basal cell carcinoma.

The cancer begins as a red, scaly spot and grows slowly across the skin without pain, tenderness or bleeding, infiltrating the skin but not the body.

"That's the one that we're seeing with increasing frequency in younger women and in unusual sites like the upper lip and on the lower leg, sites that you wouldn't expect to get maximum sunlight exposure," Dr. Marks said.

Once renowned for their bronzed complexions, Australians have one of the highest incidences of skin cancer in the world.

A study released last October found Australians had a 60 per cent chance of developing skin cancer and were more than four times as likely as Americans and nine times as likely as Britons to develop melanoma.

Bubble gum inventor dies

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Walter Diemer, inventor of the chewy pink confection called bubble gum, died Thursday in Lancaster, Pennsylvania at the age of 93, the New York Times said Monday.

Diemer created bubble gum by chance at the age of 23 while he was working as an accountant for the Fleer Chewing Gum Company in Philadelphia, the daily said.

While testing recipes

for a gum base — the element that makes gum chewy — Diemer produced his first batch of bubble gum, dyeing it pink because that was the only food colouring available, the daily said.

For jaded American chewers, who had been chomping gum since 1870, Diemer's formula offered a softer, less sticky alternative that quickly became a commercial hit.

As a selling technique,

Diemer trained his salesmen to blow large, membranous bubbles to demonstrate its qualities to potential buyers.

The bubble king ultimately became Fleer's vice-president, but never touched royalties for his invention, according to his wife Florence Freeman Kohler Diemer.

Instead, he was content to know he had made millions of children happy worldwide, she said.

India's Hindu nationalists dub Sonia Gandhi a 'foreigner'

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's most powerful Hindu nationalist group has dismissed the Italian-born widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as a "foreigner" with no understanding of the country, a newspaper reported Tuesday.

Rajendra Singh, chief of the Rashtriya Swamamsewak Sangh (RSS), National Volunteer Corps, said Monday that Sonia Gandhi, who is campaigning for the Congress party, was a foreigner and "a woman with fair skin" who happened to marry an Indian.

The Indian Express said Mr. Singh made the remarks — the first personal attack on Sonia Gandhi since she made her political debut two days ago for the Congress party — at a rally of supporters in the western city of Nagpur.

"She has no idea of the problems (in) this holy land," Mr. Singh said.

The RSS is a hardline Hindu revivalist group. The Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party), widely viewed as the front-runner in the February-March elections ahead of the rival Congress, is its political wing.

Mr. Singh said if Indians decided to support Sonia Gandhi in the polls "it would be" an unfortunate reminder of the slave mentality deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche.

The Congress, who are hoping to exploit the Gandhi name in the polls, reacted angrily.

"It is unfortunate that people who claim to be proponents of Indian culture and civilisation expose themselves by accusing Sonia Gandhi of being a foreigner," said party spokeswoman Ambika Soni.

"It is the basic tenet of Indian culture that when a woman gets married, she becomes a part and parcel of her husband's family," Ms. Soni said here. "She ceases to be what she was in her parents' home."

Sonia Gandhi, 51, married in 1968 into the Nehru-Gandhi family, which has led India and the Congress for most of the 50 years since the country's independence in 1947.

She took Indian citizenship in 1986 and lives in New Delhi. Since her husband's death, she had concentrated on charity work and keeping the Gandhi heritage alive.

Ambika Soni added: "The issue before the people is not who has a fair skin or dark skin. India has both fair and dark skin in abundance. The relevant question is who is raising relevant issues concerning our people."

"Sonia Gandhi has involved herself totally with issues of the common man, through her Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. And everyone knows that."

Congress has been in decline in recent years. Sonia Gandhi, after agreeing to campaign for the party, Sunday made her inaugural political speech near the site of her husband's 1991 assassination.

Some Congress members are trying to persuade her to go a step further by becoming an election candidate.

Thousands without water after chemical spill in China's Grand Canal

BEIJING (AFP) — Some 400,000 people in eastern China may be without water for almost three weeks after a chemical spill in the Grand Canal, the world's longest man-made waterway, the China Daily reported Tuesday.

Industrial waste was tipped into the canal on Jan. 3 and about 40 kilometres of the waterway have been polluted, the English-language daily said.

The Grand Canal is the main source of water supply for the town of Xuzhou in Jiangsu province and its 400,000 residents. Fire engines have been requisitioned to supply water, but several large firms have had to shut down.

"A large part of the waste came from two paper mills," the paper said. "The white foam from the chemicals used in pulp-making can be seen clearly on the canal surface."

An official at the environmental protection department in Xuzhou said there was a severe lack of water which could last another "10 days for the canal to finish purifying itself."

The two paper mills had been shut down and "other sources of industrial pollution are under investigation," the paper said. "The people who are responsible for the pollution accidents will be severely punished."

a top official, quoted by the paper, said.

The Grand Canal finished in 605 A.D. during the Sui dynasty originally stretched for 1,800 kilometres between Beijing in the north and Guangzhou in the south but is mostly silted up today.

Late last month, senior parliamentarian Wang Bingqian said soil erosion and pollution in China's rivers were threatening a severe water shortage.

India's Hindu nationalist dub Sonia Gandhi a 'foreigner'

Supporters of deposed Cambodian prince cancel return home

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — A large group of supporters of deposed Cambodian co-prime minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh have cancelled plans for a return home this week which was to have been monitored by the United Nations, U.N. officials said Tuesday.

The group of 58 people, including the prince's cabinet Director Ly Thuch, informed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) late Monday that they would not be returning as scheduled, they said.

The group, which has been in self-exile abroad fearing persecution since the violent ouster of the prince in July, was to have returned on Wednesday.

No official reason for the cancellation was given, according to the U.N. officials, but many speculated the group had been frightened by several recent events.

Late Sunday, unidentified gunmen fired a silenced weapon at a journalist affiliated with the prince's royalist FUNCINPEC party, damaging his car, according to human rights officials.

Earlier this month, a FUNCINPEC military police officer who had successfully appealed a drug smuggling conviction, was arrested at Phnom Penh airport while attempting to leave the country under U.N. protection.

In addition, on Jan. 5, King Norodom Sihanouk abruptly left the country after backing down in the face of heavy criticism and threats on a decision to unilaterally grant Prince Ranariddh a pardon should he be convicted on criminal charges he faces.

"It would be impossible to say that (these events) did not contribute to the decision to cancel their return," said one U.N. official, adding it was unclear when the group might decide to return.

Wednesday's scheduled return had been timed to precede the arrival of two senior U.N. human rights officials due in Cambodia to check on the government's preparations for July's scheduled elections.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson and the U.N. Secretary General's Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia, Thomas Hammarberg, are also expected to push Phnom Penh to investigate the extrajudicial killings of scores of the prince's supporters.

More than 40 of Prince Ranariddh's supporters were executed following his ouster and the U.N. has expressed disappointment that the murders have not been thoroughly investigated.

The return of the prince and his supporters has been deemed necessary by the international community to ensure that the upcoming polls are free, fair and credible.



A Hydro-Quebec electric utility worker tries to repair a pole damaged by an ice storm in St. Jean-Richelieu, Quebec. Residents of the area, south of Montreal, have been told by officials not to expect power for up to two weeks. Half a million people remain without power across the province (AFP photo)

Canada struggles to gain upper hand over killer cold

MONTREAL (AFP) — Southeastern Canada started to get the upper hand Monday in digging out from a week-long killer cold and icy rains that caused an estimated 500 million Canadian dollars (\$350 million) in damage.

Hydro-Quebec, the provincial power company, began to feel "cautiously optimistic," said company spokesman Jeanne Lalumière, who acknowledged that 590,000 homes were still without power.

At the worst of the storm, 1.3 million customers — or half the province — were sitting in the dark.

Hydro-Quebec has said that 200,000 customers could be without power for at least seven more days, and some perhaps for two weeks.

Throughout the region, long lines of cars were forming to pick up wood to burn or gasoline for generators. Dairy farms are particularly vulnerable.

Hospitals are packed and shelters have been organised to care for those without heat and light, with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien pleading for those with power to help care for those without.

"It is imperative that those who don't have heat leave their homes," said Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard, saying that police and military would guard empty homes.

Local police were also

authorised to conduct identity checks on people found mulling about after dark in areas of Montreal bereft of power.

Hydro-Quebec has 4,000 people working day and night to replace 24,000 high-tension wires and poles that were downed by ice and icy branches.

A total 12,000 Canadian troops were mobilised to help replace downed power lines and clear away tree limbs and other debris in an operation that Mr. Chrétien called the "largest peacetime Canadian military mobilisation."

Downtown Montreal remained deserted Monday, as military vehicles criss-crossed the city. Firefighters laboured to knock down slabs of ice from tall buildings creating life-threatening hazards throughout the city.

In Montreal, most schools, colleges, factories and offices were closed Monday after officials appealed for measures to be taken to conserve electricity. That appeal was made also for Tuesday and Wednesday.

Another 80,000 power customers in eastern Ontario and several thousand in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have also been without electricity for days because of the icy rain.

Private insurance claims to date totalled \$245 million while tallies in the public sec-

tor are expected to be about the same, Treasury Board President Marcel Masse said.

The figures do not include the costs of Quebec power line repairs, emergency shelters or the cost of deploying troops and materiel, Mr. Masse said.

Mr. Chrétien said the government had not started compensation procedures but would when the damages have been cleared away. He said Quebec has been the worst hit.

The prime minister delayed a trade mission to Latin America because of the crisis.

The devastating ice storm struck Canada Jan. 5, toppling trees and power lines. Since the start of the crisis last Tuesday, there have been 15 fatalities — including people killed by falling ice, fires and carbon monoxide poisoning — as well as several hundred injuries.

Help arrived from northern Quebec, particularly the Saguenay region, the recipient of an outpouring of aid across Canada during dramatic flooding two years ago.

The region sent dozens of trucks carrying firewood, blankets and heaters destined for the "black triangle" — the section of southeast Montreal where electricity is not expected to be restored for several weeks.

Blair sticks to May deadline for peace in Northern Ireland

TOKYO (AFP) — British Prime Minister Tony Blair said here Tuesday Northern Ireland had summoned up the courage to seek peace and he was sticking to a May deadline for agreement.

He was speaking after the British and Irish governments drafted a new political structure for Northern Ireland and presented it to the parties involved in peace talks which resumed Monday after a Christmas break.

Mr. Blair, on his last day of a five-day visit to Japan, said discussion about Northern Ireland should always be cautious because "there have been many false starts in the past."

"What is important is that we have moved from symbolism to substance, we are now talking about a real document with real items in it, a real framework on which we can build," the prime minister told a news conference.

"The best thing about what has happened is that people and politicians across the divide in Northern Ireland have summoned up the courage to walk away from the darkness and take at least the first steps into light."

If parties to the peace talks agree, the plan will form the skeleton for negotiations towards a peace settlement on to which the negotiators will add detail.

The document was given a cautious welcome by pro-Britain Protestant unionists and moderate pro-Ireland Catholic nationalists in Northern Ireland when it was presented.

Mr. Blair said the talks presented to Northern Ireland's people "more unfamiliar territory. It is more difficult for them, it poses new challenges but my goodness it is more healthy and bener in the long term."

"It is a balanced package,

it has some bits in it that people won't like from whatever side but at long last we have something that both sides of the community can use as an opportunity to debate the future in Northern Ireland in a constructive way."

Asked whether he was sticking to the May deadline for a peace agreement in Northern Ireland, Mr. Blair said: "Yes, I still believe in that May deadline and I still think it is important to hold to it."

Britain and Ireland have set a May deadline for a solution.

According to a survey published by the Belfast Telegraph Monday, 86 per cent of Protestants and 80 per cent of Catholics found the idea of a Northern Ireland assembly — one of the main proposals — "acceptable."

Dublin and London also proposed a powerful cross-border administration to promote Ireland-Northern

Ireland links — aimed at pleasing republicans as it would cement links with Ireland.

The plan also calls for a "Council of the Isles," which would include representatives from all parts of Britain and Ireland, a measure designed to appeal to Protestants as it would ensure continued British involvement.

The assembly would be elected from Northern Ireland, while the cross-border body would have ministers from the assembly and the Irish government, and be accountable to both.

It came after intensive discussions Mr. Blair and his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern.

The two men spoke on the telephone between Tokyo and Dublin up to eight times in the 24 hours before the peace talks resumed at Stormont earlier Monday after a break for Christmas and the New Year.

Parents of bird flu teenager to sue Hong Kong government

HONG KONG (AFP) — The parents of a Hong Kong teenager who died after catching bird flu plan to sue the government for negligence over her death, a report said Tuesday.

Tse Man, 13, died on Dec. 21 from multiple organ failure and pneumonia brought on by the virus, which has also killed three other people. Seventeen other people have been confirmed as suffering from the illness.

Her parents Monday applied for legal aid, accusing the Health Department and the hospital where she was treated of negligence, the South China Morning Post reported.

Tse was taken to hospital in late November with flu symptoms but discharged after three days. She was readmitted three days after that with pneumonia but her condition gradually deteriorated, the report said.

Her mother Tse Wong said prompt action by the Health Department could have saved her daughter.

"Had the Health Department seriously taken follow up action in the few months after the first confirmed case, my daughter could have survived," the Post quoted her as saying.

Her parents are demanding an official inquiry into the girl's death, the report said.

The government last month ordered the mass slaughter of all 1.3 million chickens in Hong Kong in a drastic attempt to check the spread of the disease.

Hong Kong officials Monday claimed initial victory in the fight against bird flu saying no new cases had been detected in the two weeks since the slaughter.

Heavy snowfall impedes China quake relief efforts

BEIJING (AFP) — Heavy snowfall Tuesday brought further misery to tens of thousands of villagers left homeless by a powerful earthquake in Hebei province northwest of Beijing, the Xinhua news agency reported.

The snow "posed difficulties to transport of disaster relief materials to Zhangbei and Shuangyi counties," the hardest hit by Saturday's tremor, which killed 47 and destroyed or seriously damaged 70,000 houses, the official agency reported.

Relief workers and army troops have been rushing to deliver food, tents, blankets and other supplies to the worst-hit areas.

The snow will create more problems for survivors trying to recover from the devastation. Despite the coldest temperatures of the winter, many villagers have been ordered to stay out of their damaged homes indefinitely because

of the continued threat of aftershocks.

Daytime temperatures have hovered around minus 10 degrees Celsius, falling as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius at night.

Xinhua said the mercury is expected to drop another five to eight degrees by Sunday.

Charity groups in Hong Kong, meanwhile, launched a drive to raise funds from private citizens and have requested that the territory's government release more than 17 million Hong Kong dollars (\$2.19 million) from its disaster relief fund to help the earthquake victims.

The government has yet to decide how much it will contribute, but a spokesman said applications for the public funds would be processed as soon as possible.

A 12-member medical team from the Red Cross is to be dispatched to the disaster scene, a spokesman

for Red Cross said.

The Red Cross has also appealed for \$6.24 million from the government fund to help 18,000 people — five per cent of those affected — by providing them with coats and blankets.

Other charity groups such as World Vision, the Salvation Army, Oxfam and the Jian Hua Foundation have also started fund drives.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-Hwa told reporters Monday that the government was "closely working" with Red Cross officials and would make a decision "very soon" on its assistance package.

Japan's foreign ministry announced Tuesday that Tokyo would send emergency aid of 63 million yen (\$477,300). The aid comprises \$300,000 in funds, as well as relief goods such as tents and blankets, the ministry said.

Pakistan has also indicated it will provide aid.

Known virus major cause of Kenya epidemic — S. African scientists

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — South African scientists have isolated a rare killer virus, Rift Valley fever, as being responsible for the majority of deaths in a killer outbreak in Kenya that has so far claimed over 350 lives.

Johannesburg's National Institute for Virology was sent specimens from victims and diagnosed Rift Valley fever in over two-thirds, Professor Bob Swanepoel, head of the institute's maximum security laboratory, told AFP Monday.

There is Rift Valley fever, there is no doubt about that," said Swanepoel, adding that his findings had been confirmed earlier Monday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, the other institute where specimens had been sent for diagnosis.

"Two-thirds of the people we've shown, had Rift Valley fever. The others were probably something else," Prof. Swanepoel said.

He suggested that the other victims may probably have been killed by diseases due to appalling living conditions brought about by heavy floods in the area of the epidemic — northeastern Kenya, near the Somali border.

"It may be because they were in bad shape anyway, due to poverty and malnutrition,"

Rift Valley fever is transmitted by mosquito and is believed to have been contracted by the victims through the slaughter and consumption of infected livestock.

The mosquito population has undergone an explosion in northeastern Kenya, which is normally arid, due

to recent extensive flooding "creating pools of surface water everywhere" — ideal conditions for the pest.

Prof. Swanepoel said his team was continuing its research into the outbreak and insisted a more wide-ranging study was needed to determine its scale.

He said a quarter of a million people in Egypt contracted the virus in late 1987 and early 1988, killing 598. "That shows that less than point five per cent get the fatal form and die," said Prof. Swanepoel.

"But the situation appears to be different now. It could be a hotter virus, a mutation, or something," he warned.

"What needs to be done now is an altogether bigger study. We need to see how many benign infections there are vis-a-vis fatal ones. We need to see how big this is."

Castro wins vote ten days before papal visit

HAVANA (AFP) — This weekend's elections in Cuba were won handily by President Fidel Castro, which his supporters said gives the Cuban leader renewed credibility ten days before a visit by Pope John Paul II.

Mr. Castro's critics say the national elections, held every five years, carry little meaning because there was not a single opposition candidate among the 601 would-be assembly deputies, and 1,192 candidates for the 14 provincial assemblies.

But some analysts have suggested Mr. Castro, who has dominated politics here since a 1959 revolution, will tout the high turnout in the vote to gain credibility before the Pope's historic Jan.

21-25 visit. It will be the first visit by the Pontiff to the island nation.

There was a record turnout, with fewer than 3 per cent of Cuba's 7.8 million registered voters abstaining, according to official tallies.

The Cuban president said Sunday he would gladly accept the presidency so he could continue defending the Communist country against its "enemies."

The government-controlled Cuban press also cheered the election outcome as a "triumph of the Revolution over its enemies." Mr. Castro cast his ballot Sunday in El Cobre, a town of 18,000 on the island's southeastern edge, against a backdrop of hundreds of applauding

supporters assembled in the main square.

National elections were first held in Cuba in 1976, and turnout has been high.

Supporters say the big turnout is proof that most Cubans support Mr. Castro, since voting is not mandatory on the island.

One possible explanation for the high voter turnout, however, is peer pressure: an election day, groups of children traditionally pound on the doors of any voters who have overlooked their civic duties.

The final result of the elections was no great surprise. Voters are asked to choose from a list of pre-selected Communist candidates for national and provincial

assemblies.

And the number of seats corresponded exactly to the number of candidates, making it a foregone conclusion that the anointed contenders would be seated.

In the run-up to the Pope's visit on Jan. 21-25, Mr. Castro was asked Sunday if he believed in God and declined to answer.

"That's my business," he told journalists. "If you say you don't believe in God, you hurt those who do. And if you say you do believe in God, you hurt those who don't."

"I respect all those who believe, and I respect those who do not. It is the duty of a political man," Mr. Castro added.

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Torture in Israel

ISRAEL'S CRUEL treatment of Palestinian detainees was given due consideration by the International Committee Against Torture over and over again especially during its last two sessions. What prompted the committee to take up the issue was not only the Israeli security apparatus's widespread resort to torture in interrogating Palestinians but also the apparent endorsement of torture practices as defensible and legitimate under certain circumstances by Israel's high court of justice. This judicial approval of torture naturally drew worldwide condemnation from various quarters among which was the committee itself, Amnesty International, the Commission of International Jurists and a number of human rights organisations based in different parts of the world.

It had been hoped that this international outcry would spur the Israeli government, especially the judiciary, to action in a bid to prevent the practice of torture whether de jure or de facto. Unfortunately, however, the Israeli authorities have decided not to heed these calls. Only a couple of days ago the supreme court rejected, albeit by a narrow majority, an appeal by a Palestinian detainee seeking a halt to the use of physical force against him by his police interrogators.

There may be some consolation in the fact that four of the nine judges sitting on the bench handed down a dissenting view against torture in Israel. But it appears that the five supreme judges who rejected the appeal of the Palestinian rested their case on the current Israeli law that permits the use of "moderate physical pressure" against detainees and even more severe interrogation methods where there is cause to believe that a terrorist attack is imminent.

In this process Israel seems to have forgotten that it is party to the International Convention Against Torture which is binding on all signatories. For the Israeli judicial branch to go against not only the international current against torture but also against their state's treaty obligations is something that should be viewed as reflective of Israel's defiance of international order in every respect. When even the so-called "moderate physical pressure" that the laws of Israel condone include prolonged sleep deprivation and other inhuman treatment, what should we expect in cases permitting the use of severe interrogation methods?

The current Israeli government has been isolating its country politically by not respecting the spirit and substance of the Oslo accords. Now the Israeli political system is adding to the woes by not observing basic human rights standards either. No wonder the Arab side can expect very little from the faltering peace process and from the prospects of a culture of peace and human rights in this part of the world.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

A WRITER for Al Ra'i said that in the light of the developments in the Middle East and Israel's intransigent position, Europe can do something to give impetus to the peace process through freezing trade agreements between the European Union and the Jewish state. Israel should not be given any awards for its present policies and should not be encouraged to persist in building settlements and disregarding the peace accords with the Palestinians, he said. Mere statements of condemnation of the Israeli practices in the occupied Arab lands would not yield any positive results and would not do any good to the peace process unless they are backed by practical steps, said the writer. Referring to the U.S. position, he said that the U.S. administration's failure to force Netanyahu to respect the peace accords was tantamount to giving him a free hand and encouraging his government to persist in its intransigent position. He said against all this the Palestinians have no alternative but to unify their ranks and refrain from carrying out a single attack inside Israel so as not to give Netanyahu an excuse to impose further acts of repression on the Palestinian people.

MOHAMMAD DAOUD, a writer for Al Dustour criticised members of the Lower House of Parliament for making lengthy speeches during the debate on the 1998 fiscal budget draft law. He said that some deputies took advantage of the debate to make demands from the government to meet their districts' needs of social and economic services. The debate, he said, should focus on the budget itself and on controlling public expenditure, adding that deputies should leave the question of their districts' demands to side meetings which they can hold with the concerned government ministers, said the writer. The writer pointed out that the endorsement of the 1998 fiscal budget is of vital importance because many urgent projects are awaiting implementation and so that the government can have a free hand to deal with chronic social and economic issues.

M. KAHIL



Iran-U.S. relations:

'Let the backgammon diplomacy begin'

By George S. Hishmeh

WASHINGTON — The Clinton administration is having second thoughts about the Iranian challenge to undertake expanded cultural exchanges in order to overcome the "bulky wall of mistrust" that has existed for over 18 years between them.

"We found the suggestion useful," was the cryptic afterthought of the State Department spokesman.

As a first step, the U.S. government is at present reviewing its strict visa restrictions on Iranians. In response to the "new tone" from Tehran, the United States is understood to be looking for a more formalised expansion of cultural and educational exchanges, most likely carried out by private organisations with long experience in this field.

In a "historic" interview on American television last week, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami called for an "exchange of professors, writers, scholars, artists, journalists and tourists" because a new relationship among intellectuals, he explained, could "prepare for a change and create an opportunity to study a new situation."

U.S. officials were initially disappointed that the Khatami proposal had no room for a government-to-government contacts. In the first hours of the television address, spokesmen at the White House and the State Department repeated, time and again, the U.S. government's preference for "an authorised dialogue with authorised representatives of the Iranian government — a dialogue that would be acknowledged."

In an apparent attempt not to appear tardy in this respect, leaks appearing in the American press talked about U.S. diplomatic overtures to Iran last summer with the assistance of Saudi intermediaries; and another after Khatami's landslide election through the Swiss ambassador in Tehran, who looks after U.S. interests there. Other less eye-catching diplomatic probes were said to have been advanced by Washington-based research groups. All ended without any overt success.

Simultaneously, Clinton administration officials are being cautious in not sounding enthusiastic with the Iranian gesture lest they upset the Iranian apple-cart, and unwittingly contribute to

one side or the other in the struggle for power presumably underway among Iran's ruling clerics.

President Clinton's National Security adviser Sandy Berger said on a television programme over the weekend: "There is obviously a contested vision of the future of Iran," and added, approvingly, "there has been more change. I think, in Iran's internal behaviour, degree of tolerance internally."

Another unidentified official quoted by the New York Times said:

"When the president of Iran, a country with whom we've had a very bad relationship for a long time, gets on CNN and addresses the American people and starts praising our values and our civilisation and talks about a dialogue, then it behoves us to respond."

President Clinton is said to be personally involved in the give-and-take on the Iranian move and his thoughts may receive a fuller public airing in his annual State of the Union address before the houses of Congress on January 27.

The quiet enthusiasm about the chance of improved relations with Iran, voiced privately by key officials and think-tank pundits, stems from the belief that otherwise the United States stands to lose out economically. Multinational firms are clamouring for business deals in Iran and the neighbouring Caspian oil-rich region. Others also see it as a great way to squeeze recalcitrant Iraq.

On the other hand, any change in U.S. policy towards Iran disturbs various groups here who keep reminding their audiences of the Iranian humiliation when 52 American diplomats were held captive for 444 days and ultimately led to the non-election of an American president.

In a bid to defuse the subdued excitement, these groups are quick to point out that the United States and the Soviet Union had enjoyed cultural exchanges throughout the cold war but this did little to warm the atmosphere between the two superpowers.

An analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where the controversial idea of dual-containment in the Gulf originated, said that "expectations should be kept modest." He gave the case of Cuba as an example where, he said, a 20-year U.S. dialogue with the Castro

regime has not yielded agreement on many issues. In fact, U.S. sanctions have even grown tougher there.

Patrick Clawson, director of research at the institute, was defensive in his response to those who argued that Khatami's initiative shows the U.S. policy of containment is falling apart. "Quite the contrary, Iran's possible interest in dialogue is a sign of the success of containment," he wrote, adding "Iran is realising the price it has paid for its self-imposed estrangement from the U.S."

He further urged the Clinton administration to increase Iranian access to information by starting up Radio Free Iran, for which \$4 million in funding was approved in November.

This is unlikely to sit well with the Iranians who are still smarting from various congressional actions — a 1955 authorisation of \$20 million for a secret programme to unsettle the Iranian government, and a 1966 law imposing sanctions on foreign companies that sign oil and gas deals with Iran.

Times have changed. A year ago, speculation was rife here about the nature of American reaction to Iran over its alleged role in the bombing of a U.S. military barracks at Khobar Towers in Dhahran, killing 19 U.S. servicemen. In fact, U.S. defence officials reportedly identified possible Iranian targets for a U.S. strike.

No one here talks anymore about bloody confrontations. In fact, some Iranians and Americans have their eyes on more crowd-pleasing events: the participation later this month of a Southern Oregon University team in a free-style wrestling competition in Iran, and an elimination soccer match between the U.S. and Iranian national teams for participation in the World Cup in France.

Roy P. Mottahedeh, professor of history at Harvard University, was not far off the mark when he pointed out that Iran, whose civilisation is almost as ancient as China's, may prefer backgammon, the game it invented, to ping-pong.

"Let the backgammon diplomacy begin," he urged.

The writer is a retired USIS editor who now lives in Washington. He contributed this article to the Jordan Times.

Algeria cannot be left alone with its horrors

By Flora Lewis

PARIS — The atrocious butcheries in Algeria have reached a dramatic new scale just as public opinion in the West is turning from ignorance to apathy to outrage. There is a comparison with Bosnia in the sense that it took a year or more for people elsewhere to realise the horror and then begin demanding with increasing insistence that their governments "do something."

European governments, and to a somewhat lesser extent the U.S. government, are facing that kind of public pressure now. They recognise that they can no longer pretend not to notice. But so far they cannot think of what to do beyond express repugnance, and talk to each other about it.

There is lots of talk going on. Algeria is on the agenda of practically every European Union (EU) meeting, and Washington is checking the European capitals. Germany's foreign minister, Klaus Kinkel, has proposed the dispatch of an

EU special mission to look into the situation and see what might be done to help suppress the terrorism and aid the victims.

The Algerian government has not yet officially responded, but it has rejected all previous suggestions as intolerable interference.

It denies the scope of the killings despite documented reports in the Algerian media, whose journalists have shown awesome courage at the real risk of their own lives, and claims that it is getting the situation "under control."

There can be no question of sending in outside force so long as the Algerian government is recognised as legitimate and refuses any kind of intervention or mediation. In any event, what would foreign troops or advisers do? What would be their mission? There is no useful answer.

Does this mean that nothing can be done except gasp in dismay, issue statements and perhaps pass resolutions? People in Algeria feel abandoned. They can't

believe that no one will help to stop such crimes against humanity, but they don't know where to appeal.

The Algerian government angrily denounced as "unacceptable" a formal French statement condemning these "acts of barbaric savagery" and noting the "legitimate right of the Algerian population to be protected."

France, which has been generally supportive of the government up to now and kept a low profile on the issue despite its special importance to people here, did not specify who is to blame.

The role of the government and army has been murky. There are rumours that sometimes they have been responsible for crimes in order to rally the disaffected population against Islamic extremists fighting for power. There have been no proofs. But it has been widely noticed that even when there have been military installations quite nearby and the massacres go on for hours, no one has come to the defence of the victims. It is a poignant example of

the dilemma of the law of nations, the right of unquestioned sovereignty versus the duty to provide the most basic human right, the right not to be murdered.

So it is essential to find a way to put some pressure on the Algerian government. A coalition of important countries — and it must be coordinated — should tell the government that if it is unable to protect its people, they will be sympathetic to a request for help. And if it is unwilling, they can no longer provide international support through such institutions as the World Bank and credit arrangements.

This is not sanctions, which almost surely could not be organised and would disrupt the world oil market beyond what anybody is ready to accept as well as put the main burden of punishment on the suffering population.

Is it blackmail? Yes, and well-justified, leaving it up to Algiers how much it wants to be inconvenienced and isolated. The benefits of full participation in the

international community require the observation of certain minimum human standards.

It would be of great help if Islamic authorities, voices of the religious community as well as of governments, spoke loudly to denounce the murders as violations of the meaning of Islam.

Surprisingly, the Iranian government, which Algiers has held responsible for supporting the terrorists, has openly called for measures by the United Nations and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to "prevent such inhuman acts."

Western governments can quietly encourage friendly Arab states to join the chorus of opprobrium.

Something does have to be done. It is not easy, because the familiar tools do not work. It takes creative diplomacy to find the effective pressure points. Just to give up and weep in despair helps no one. This is what the concept of international community is supposed to be about — *The New York Times*

Sugar Free

BY RAMZIE KHOURY

A matter of life and death

THE PERSON who must have had nothing else to do but create the Tamagotchi electronic pet, is a genius. A child can choose the pet they want by pressing a button, and then must take good care of it or it will die.

In fact, its sudden death is inevitable if you take into consideration that the child does not only have to feed it, water it, clean the poop and offer it medication for no obvious reason, the pet must also listen to music, play spelling games and be danced with, on a daily basis, to insure that it never gets bored to death.

This is good because you can now utilise the infamous Tamagotchi to inflict psychological trauma on your child until they accept death as part of their daily lives, without the mess, smell and burial rights accompanying a flesh and blood type of pet.

At one point, the child may even opt to ignore its pet on purpose, and by that, exercise merciful death unto the annoying demanding beings sharing his life. By that, a parent is laying the foundation for a future proficient dictator fit to rule the most deserving of Arab nationalities.

When J.T. Chief of Staff Fully Responsible In Front of All Cutting Edge Laws George Hawatmeh decided to mercifully kill my column last week, the second article after months of drought, you could tell that after all the years he has been "doing it" he still is not comfortable with the act. Neither was Slave of God Offerings, the J.T. deputy boss famous for his mushy heart and an overwhelming interest in intellectual real estate. These characters have obviously not had the opportunity to own a Tamagotchi when they were young, a long time ago.

If it wasn't my imagination playing games on me, the two conferred for at least six hours to discuss how they will break the news on my head, and then exploded into a week-long weeping spree accompanied by thunder; the reason behind the massive amount of snow you have been witnessing on the pages of the Jordan Times lately.

But no worry. It is never too late to learn. Those who have developed the means to adjust a child to survive the realities of life and death can reprogramme their toys to meet the needs of adults.

Adult Tamagotchi wanted:

Pets must include the following forms: Poor Franciscina, Abu Nader The Hun and Tareq Speedy Gonzalez.

Daily chores: Pat pet on the back then chop off a sentence. Smile to pet then rewrite the whole bloody thing. Massage pet's shoulders then kill the article.

Entertainment: Hold editors meeting. Make someone write editorial. Discuss the Press and Publications Law with Abdullah Hasanat.

If above toy is available, new or used, please deliver to all of those eyeing Mr. Hawatmeh's position for when he leaves in June, if he sticks to rumours. The character willing to replace him must be able to murder satire without blinking!

All costs will most likely be covered by the Press Publications Higher Committee.

Feature...
authorities...
Israel...
for new...
continued from page...
PNA cr...
ahead...
continued from page...

A hand-drawn map of Madaba, Jordan, showing streets, landmarks, and a route to Amman. The map is oriented with North at the top, indicated by a vertical arrow labeled 'N'. The title 'MADABA' is written in bold, underlined letters at the top right. The map shows a network of streets including 'K. Abdullah Street', 'Kings Street', 'Hussain Street', 'Al Nuzha Street', and 'Main Street'. Key landmarks and locations marked include 'Hisban', 'Mt. Nebo', 'Resthouse', 'Small church', 'St. George (Plastic Map)', '1885 house', 'Burnt Palace', 'New restaurant', 'Virgin Mary', 'Latin Church', 'Museum', 'Church of the Apostles', and 'Nifil'. A 'KING'S HIGHWAY' is shown running diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right, leading to 'AMMAN'. A 'Birkat' is marked near the bottom left. The map is drawn with simple lines and includes various symbols like squares and crosses to represent buildings and churches.

Richard Tanner

- reports

protect his family in the village of Sidi Al Kebir, south of Algiers, the papers said. Newspapers said the assailants booby-trapped the victim's body before leaving and two civil security agents were injured by the blast.

The latest massacres were part of an upsurge in violence in a six-year war between the military-backed authorities and armed Islamist groups that erupted after the cancellation of elections the Islamic Salvation Front was poised to win.

Jordanian delegation leaves for U.S. seeking higher aid package for 1999

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A top-level team led by Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh left for Washington on Tuesday for talks on the 1999 economic and military aid package to the Kingdom, officials said.

Mr. Tarawneh, accompanied by Planning Minister Rima Khalaf and Central Bank of Jordan Governor Ziad Fariz, will demand Washington to raise the package above the \$225 million proposed by Congress for 1998, they added.

Around \$150 million of 1998 allocations were used to fund local projects while \$75 million were part of a military package to Jordan, they said.

"The U.S. aid was a reward for the Kingdom's outstanding peace efforts in the region and its success to implement the economic restructuring programme," Nabil Ammari, Planning Ministry secre-

tary-general, told the Jordan Times.

"We hope the Jordanian team will reach an agreement with the U.S. officials on the size of the American aid to Jordan," Dr. Ammari said.

"There is an American inclination to continue the aid package for the coming year," he added.

He said the size of the package would be agreed on before the end of this month.

Once agreement is clinched, a U.S. financial committee will discuss the package before sending it to the U.S. Congress for approval, Dr. Ammari said.

"We hope that the annual U.S. aid will be raised for the upcoming year," he added.

Last year's aid included \$100 million which the U.S. transferred to Amman from its massive foreign aid to Israel and Egypt.

Samir Mutawi, minister of state for information Affairs, told reporters after

a bi-weekly cabinet meeting Tuesday there were "positive" signs that the U.S. administration will approve the annual aid package.

"The U.S. inclination to assist Jordan is a positive one. There is a big understanding for Jordan's role in the region," Dr. Mutawi said.

"There is an American desire to support Jordan and its development projects, especially projects for a social security network," he noted.

Jordanian-American ties, which hit low level at the height of the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, improved dramatically after Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

Washington increased its economic aid, which stood at a modest \$7.2 million in 1996, as a sign of support to Jordan and its stability.

Jordan will also test Washington's readiness to help Amman reduce its economic dependence on

Iraq which supplies the Kingdom with most of its energy needs, Reuters news agency reported.

But Washington has been non-committal over giving any pledge to help Amman find alternative sources of oil.

Jordan's oil purchases from Iraq are exempted from U.N. sanctions banning Baghdad from exporting its oil as punishment for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The U.S. has also given a pledge to Amman to grant goods produced in the northern Jordanian industrial zone, close to the border with Israel, free trade status to help foster Jordanian-Israeli joint ventures.

The deal, which was signed between Jordan and Israel at the Doha economic summit, expands an earlier proclamation made by U.S. President Bill Clinton which extended free trade to products of the West Bank and Gaza to the U.S. markets.

وزارة الاشغال والاسكان وزارة العطاءات الحكومية

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS & HOUSING
GOVERNMENT TENDERS DIRECTORATE

Invitation for Prequalification for Central Tender No. (176/97) Aqaba New Industrial Jetty Civil Engineering Works and General Services

The Ports Corporation of Jordan through the Government Tenders Directorate/the Ministry of Public Works and Housing wishes to invite suitably qualified international contractors, and local contractors classified by the Government Tenders Directorate as first grade Buildings or first grade Bridges and Culverts, to apply jointly or individually for prequalification for the above mentioned project.

1. Project Description:
The works under this contract will comprise but not be limited to:
a. Hydraulic survey of site.
b. Supply, handle, pitch and drive large diameter steel tubular piles in offshore location.
c. Manufacture, handle and place offshore precast reinforced concrete structural members.
d. Manufacture, handle and place in the permanent works offshore, in situ reinforced concrete.
e. Supply and fixing unloader rails, unloader butlers, marine ladders, ladders and bollards.
f. Supply and erection of steel walkway between jetty and mooring dolphin.
g. Construction of foundations for conveyor support.
h. General services including water, fire lighting, pipe-work for handling liquid ammonia and phosphoric acid, external lighting, communications and electrical building services.

2. The project in question shall be partially financed by the European Investment Bank.
3. Contractors applying for prequalification as a joint venture must express their intent to do so and must confirm that a duly certified joint venture agreement, as per the form attached to the prequalification documents, shall be enclosed with their financial proposals. The joint venture agreement shall be legalised by a local notary public.

4. Contractors prequalified jointly (as a joint venture) shall only be allowed to bid accordingly. Contractors thus applying for prequalification shall confirm that should they be awarded the contract, their joint venture agreement shall be binding upon them for the whole duration of the contract.

5. The prequalification documents are available and may be purchased at the Government Tenders Directorate, P.O. Box 1220, Amman 11118, Jordan. Telephone No. 606757. Facsimile No. 606751.

6. The non-refundable fee set for the purchase of one set of prequalification documents is JD50.

7. The latest date for purchasing the prequalification documents shall be February 5, 1998.
8. Applications for prequalification shall be submitted in three exemplars (one original and two copies), in the English language, and should be addressed to:

Chairman, Central Tenders Committee,
Government Tenders Directorate,
Ministry of Public Works and Housing.

9. The latest date for the submission of the application for prequalification to the Government Tenders Directorate shall be 12:00 hours local Jordan time on March 7, 1998.

10. Prequalification applications shall be opened in the presence of interested applicants at 13:30 hours local Jordan time on March 7, 1998.

Chairman / Central Tenders Committee
Director General
Eng. Naser Madadha

Bonn reschedules DM94m of Jordan debt to Germany

BONN (J.T.) — Jordan and Germany Tuesday initiated an agreement on rescheduling 94 million Deutschmarks of Jordanian debts to Germany.

The amount is nearly 12.5 per cent of the Kingdom's total debt to Bonn. DM90 million are debts due to the German government and DM4 million are loans to help finance Jordan's exports.

According to Odeh Sweiss, head of the Jordanian negotiating team who initiated the agreement, the Germans have reduced the interest on its DM90 million credit to the Jordanian government to 2.7 per cent down from 2.75 per cent. The interest on the loan to finance exports was also reduced to seven per cent from 8.5 per cent.

Dr. Sweiss said the Germans have agreed to cut DM40 million from the total \$400 million debt to help Jordan finance projects included in the social safety package plan which is designed to deal with

unemployment and poverty in Jordan.

The agreement rescheduled payment of loans and interest falling due between June 1997 and February 1998 according to Dr. Sweiss.

Dr. Sweiss, director of the finance department at the Ministry of Finance, said the accord is the fourth to be initiated with Germany. The agreement followed negotiations during which Jordan conveyed to the German government the improvements in the Jordanian economy, the reduction in the fiscal budget deficit in relation to the gross domestic product, and the success in raising foreign currency reserves. For the first time, the Kingdom has succeeded in achieving a surplus in its balance of payments by the end of 1997.

In the past few years, Jordan and Germany signed three debt rescheduling agreements, the latest being in 1994.

French wine exports fizzle

PARIS (AFP) — Exports of French wines and spirits rose by more than 15 per cent last year from the figure for 1996 to more than 40 billion francs (\$6.6 billion), an initial trade estimate has showed.

Imports were believed to have fallen and the balance should show a record of about 36 billion francs from 31 billion francs in

1996, the federation of exporters of wines and spirits said.

Negative effects of the crisis in South East Asia had been marginal and growth in the main markets such as Britain and the United States had been increased by favourable exchange rates.

Did you know ?

There are only 4 shops in Jordan that rent and sell only

*** ORIGINAL ***
Videos, CD's, and Cassettes!
The Pleasure Dome

Um Utheina - Suweifiyyah - Ahlia Abela Superstores .. and now.. in Abdoun .

Bring this advertisement to our Abdoun branch to get a free video rental!
Enquiries ? Tel . 864130

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- Put up with
- Quasi-religious group
- Seth's pop
- Botherations
- Goli's continent
- "Persistence of Memory" painter
- Breathing room?
- Shaped like a flat egg
- "Gomer" USMC
- Selling point
- Hoarfrost
- Math sub.
- Noted speaker
- Weapon of mass destruction
- Shemp's tormentor
- Brown bird
- Shepard and King
- Algerian port
- "Divine Poems" poet
- Lamb's pen name
- Passover meal
- Has an opinion
- Prefix for puncture
- Hunting dog
- Actress Mason
- Marker
- Classic saga
- Guy with bread
- Pairs
- Pro
- Emergency air supply
- Italian treats
- podrida
- Ball attendee
- Evaluation
- Potential plant
- Love-it

DOWN

- Resting on
- Too squared off
- Pastoral poem
- Turned-down corner

5 Suffix for a language

6 "Memory" musical

7 Various functions

8 Queue

9 British military spectacle

10 Charming

11 Nautical crane

12 Crockett's Waterloo

13 Bannister or Coe, e.g.

14 Pastored

15 Alamos, NM

16 Sandhurst sch.

17 Healthcare

18 Time long past

19 Unusable

20 Old-style poetry

21 San Fran griddle

22 Deadly poisons

23 Jail

24 French city

25 St. Paul, once

26 Informative TV

27 The "Strikes Back"

28 Bleacher blast

29 Paulo, Brazil

30 Forbidden acts

31 Mace source

32 Deserve

33 Swiftly

34 Sacred acts

35 Wheel shaft

36 Auto racer

37 Pony

38 Mild oath

39 Room maker

40 Capital of Norway

41 Slant

42 Cagers' org.

Peanuts

DID BEETHOVEN EVER PLAY "JINGLE BELLS"?

HE PROBABLY THOUGHT HE WAS TOO GOOD TO PLAY "JINGLE BELLS"

BONK!

IF I HAD BEEN THERE I WOULD HAVE SAID "HEY, LUDWIG, PLAY 'JINGLE BELLS'!"

Andy Capp

IT'S NOT "RIGHT, Y'KNOW"

THE WAY SHE JUMPS ON MY SHORT COMINGS

NOT TO MENTION MY LATE COMINGS

Mutt'n'Jeff

WITH THE COST OF CHICKEN FEED THESE DAYS, CHICKEN FEED IS NO LONGER CHICKEN FEED!

THE MCQUEENS' GIRLS GETTING MARRIED TODAY AT TWO PM.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Have you thought about going back to school? Call the university and ask some probing questions. What are the entrance requirements? How much does it cost? When does the next semester start? You're usually brave, but this may have you cowering in your boots. You don't have to do it by yourself. A friend would be more than happy to help.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) There'll be a hassle. This time, it's you who can't see the obvious answer. Get someone to help you see what you're missing. The best counsellor for you will be ruthlessly honest. Pick this person out on purpose. Otherwise, your adversary might, and then you'd be at even more of a disadvantage.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You're confident and self-assured, and a little calmer. Be careful travelling this afternoon, however. There could be a hassle on the highway. You might get there more quickly if you take surface streets. Finding your way around town could turn out to be a lot of fun. Let your curiosity be your guide.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You like to buy things for other people, and you can always justify that. When it comes to buying for yourself, however, it's a different story. Well, why don't you look over the situation with a different perspective? If you've worked hard lately and you deserve a treat, go out and get yourself one.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) This is a better day for you. Yesterday, frustrations were wearing you a little thin. Now you're getting back in control. There's still a lot to do, but most of the worst stuff is already scratched off your list. Give work your full attention for a little while longer — another week, to be exact.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Someone new is giving you an assignment. He or she is not in the direct chain of command over you, so why should you do it? Well, it'll make you look good to a rival. Your influence will spread and so will your fame and fortune. Besides, you're a nice person, so go ahead and do it.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) An older person might handle part of your responsibilities for you. All you have to do is follow directions. You're putting yourself in the right spot to get the coaching you need. That shows maturity. There's no reason you have to know everything. All you have to know is how to find the person who does know everything.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) An older person has your agenda figured out today. This might bring in more money than you thought. One of the hardest parts of the job will be keeping your mouth shut when you see a mistake in progress. Well, maybe you shouldn't. There's a way you can point this out nicely, isn't there?

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Your opportunity to travel has shown up already. You can think of all sorts of places you'd like to go. You're probably not in a financial position to do the top one on your list, though. Take your date to the most exotic location you can find for lunch and you'll be pleasantly surprised.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) If there's not enough money in your account, it's a good day to ask for a loan. You'd rather pay cash up-front for everything. In this situation, however, it might be best to borrow. You'll be able to do something you wouldn't have been able to do otherwise. Don't worry. You'll make the money to pay it back.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) The moon's in Leo, across the Zodiac from Aquarius. Leo is the builder and Aquarius is the planner. If you don't have a person like that in your life, find one today. After you meet and make your amenities, decide what to build next. Review the possibilities this afternoon and make the decision this evening or tomorrow.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Lots of things need to be done at work, and can't be put off any longer. You might get a new assignment around the middle of the day. Either it's something you don't want to do or else it's in your job description. But you'll make extra money if you can handle it anyway. Are you up for the challenge?

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen

GLASBERGEN

"I'm going out to finish my shopping — I still have 85¢ left on my credit card!"

JUMBLE. THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

CREYM

NAPAG

ONCOMM

SMUCLY

Print answer here: WITH

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: AHEAD TONIC DIGEST MAYHEM
Answer: Living in an opulent penthouse made them this — "HIGH-MINDED"

Busi...

Ar...

IPC...

REUTE...

Th...

Major Cur...

Currency	US\$
US Dollar	0.54
DE Mark	0.54
GB Sterl	0.67
CH Franc	0.67
JP Yen	0.00
CA Dollar	0.69
IL Lira	0.00
HK Dollar	0.00
FR Franc	0.16

Currency	US\$
US Dollar	0.54
Jordan Dollar	0.54
Saudi Riyal	0.54
Bahraini Dinar	0.54
Omani Rial	0.54
Kuwaiti Dinar	0.54
Emirati Dinar	0.54
Libanese Lira	0.54
Egyptian	0.54

Commodity	Energy
Oil	15.10
Gas	15.10
Coal	15.10
Electricity	15.10
Water	15.10
Wheat	15.10
Barley	15.10
Maize	15.10
Soybeans	15.10
Corn	15.10
Wheat	15.10
Barley	15.10
Maize	15.10
Soybeans	15.10
Corn	15.10

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Daily Business Deal

A review of news from the Arabic Press

IPC preparing general national strategy to improve investment climate in Jordan

**** TOTAL INVESTMENTS** during the January-September period of last year amounted to around JD269.4 million of which JD43.6 million were foreign investments or 16.2 per cent of total investments, Investment Promotion Corporation (IPC) Director General Muntasser Uqlah has announced. He explained that 146 projects benefited from the Investment Promotion Law.

The projects include 108 industrial entities at a cost of JD156.5 million and 38 hotel businesses at a cost of JD95.6 million. Other projects covered were eight agricultural schemes costing JD7.6 million, one in the marine transport and railways sector at a cost of JD4.2 million and a hospital at a cost of JD5.5 million.

Dr. Uqlah said the IPC has completed the computerisation, auditing and classifying of all files and records of the new projects that benefited of the law. He added that the IPC has implemented 16 agreements to encourage and protect investments signed with the United States and other European countries. Dr. Uqlah said preparations are under way to formulate and sign similar agreements.

Dr. Uqlah said the IPC has started to prepare a strategy and short-term as well as long-term plans to improve the investment climate in the Kingdom.

Industrial investments rise by 59% last year

AMMAN (Petra) — Industrial investments in Jordan have increased during 1997 by 59 per cent compared to 1996 due to economic policies adopted by the government.

A study conducted by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Supply shows that the government has promoted investments through enhancing the role of the private sector and directing its resources towards industrial projects.

The study reveals that the number of industrial companies increased from 301 carrying a value of JD32 million during 1996 to 306 valued at JD51 million in 1997.

According to the study, the number of the companies in general increased by 1.8 per cent from 4,217 companies in 1996 to 4,293 in 1997.

The study also shows that the capital of the companies registered last year amounted JD208 million.

The ministry has earlier announced that more than 61,000 companies have been registered until last year with their capitals approximated at JD4 billion.

A report in Al Rai Arabic daily reveals that foreign investment declined by 37.5 per cent from a total of JD30.5 million in 1996 to JD19.1 million in 1997.

According to Al Rai non-Jordanian investment last year were only nine per cent of the total investments which amounted to JD208 million.

Saudi stock market soars in 1997

RIYADH (AFP) — The Saudi stock market rose by 27.8 per cent in 1997, its second best performance since it was set up in 1985, the Bakheet Financial Advisors Institute has said.

The National Centre for Financial and Economic Index (NCFEI) rose to 195.89 points by year-end from 153.10 points 12 months earlier, the institute said.

"1997 is the second best performing year for the NCFEI after 1991 when it rose by 83.3 per cent," it said in a report.

An institute official, Amrur Bakheet, credited the growth to general economic improvement due to higher oil prices, and to good corporate results.

He told AFP the higher oil prices allowed the government to boost the economy and increase liquidity as it paid nearly 10 billion riyals (\$2.7 billion) out of its internal debt.

Oil earnings account for nearly 75 per cent of the budget of Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude producer.

Foreign investor buys 13% stake in Union Bank for Savings and Investment

By Ghaila Alul
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Union Bank for Savings and Investment (UBSI) said Tuesday that a strategic partner had acquired a 13 per cent equity share and helped the institution raise its capital to JD20 million in line with Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) rules.

The CBJ asked Jordan's 16 commercial banks in 1995 to raise their capital to JD20 million by the end of 1997 to boost their role on the international level.

Company International de Participations Bancaires et Financieres "bought 2.6 million of UBSI shares at a cost of JD 3.9 million in a deal that was

concluded late last year," UBSI Vice Chairman Isam Halim Salfit told the Jordan Times.

The London-based company, with investments of over \$1.2 billion, is headed by millionaire Nazmi Ouchi, a Briton of Iraqi origin.

The company now holds 13 per cent of the UBSI's total capital, a move that enabled the Amman-based bank meet CBJ's capital requirements.

Mr. Ouchi's firm also owns part of the Jordanian General Mediterranean Company for Tourism and Industrial Investments that has pumped investments worth \$110 million into the Kingdom.

The capital increases will enable all banks to

meet the requirements of the International Bank for Settlements, a key authority in clearing inter-bank disputes of an international nature and assessing the international standing of commercial banks.

Several banks have responded to CBJ's increased capital ceiling by luring foreign investments or merging with other banks.

The Jordan Investment and Finance Bank raised its capital from JD10 million to JD 20 million last October.

The Middle East Investment Bank is in talks with a Lebanese financial institution to acquire an equity share to raise its capital.

Saudi billionaire Prince Walid Ben Talal has invested over JD 5

million to help Philadelphia Investment Bank to raise its JD10 million capital to JD 20 million.

Business Bank and Jordan National Bank merged in early 1996, creating the fourth largest commercial bank in Jordan after the Arab Bank, the Housing Bank and the Islamic Bank.

The tie up, prompted by Jordan's decision to globalise its economy through agreements with the European Union and the World Trade Organisation, was the first voluntary merger of two financially sound banks with a capital of JD42 million.

REUTERS • REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates Prices as at 13/01/98 19:48									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.8216	0.0125	1.4772	131.58	1.4348	1781.00	2.0622	0.0070
DE Mark	0.5480	1.0000	0.3360	0.8113	72.22	0.7875	983.85	1.1288	0.3480
GB Sterling	1.6328	2.9739	1.0000	2.4110	216.23	2.3421	2926.42	3.3510	0.9686
CH Franc	0.6770	1.2323	0.4142	1.0000	86.06	0.9706	1212.03	138.96	4.1252
JP Yen	0.0075	1.3831	0.4649	1.1217	1.0000	0.0085	13.81	155.82	4.8302
CA Dollar	0.6871	1.2741	0.4333	1.0324	1.09	1.0000	1282.10	1.4383	4.2857
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0162	0.3416	0.0824	1363.33	0.0005	1.145	1.34018	
NL Guilder	0.4873	0.8872	0.2882	0.7196	84.09	0.6888	872.96		2.9701
FR Franc	0.1640	0.2964	0.1003	0.2419	21.55	0.2350	33.61	33.0100	

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LEB	EGP
US Dollar	1.0000	0.7090	3.7500	0.3770	3.6408	0.2668	3.6728	1.6210	0.3970
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	1.0000	5.2906	0.8317	5.1361	0.4310	5.1804	2.1488	4.7912
Saudi Riyal	0.2668	0.1080	1.0000	0.1005	0.97	0.0816	0.98	406.83	0.10105
Bahraini Dinar	2.85	1.2808	8.2488	1.0000	9.88	0.5115	9.74	4036.81	0.10105
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1947	1.0303	1.0303	1.0000	0.0840	1.01	417.90	0.9330
Kuwait Dinar	3.2685	2.3174	12.2602	12.2322	11.90	1.0000	12.00	4873.03	0.9330
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0213	1.0213	1.0000	0.0840	1.01	417.90	0.9330
Lebanese L1000	0.68	0.4860	2.4653	0.2478	2.3928	0.2011	2.4140		2.2326
Egyptian	0.2844	0.2087	1.1042	0.1110	1.0718	0.0901	1.0812	447.30	

Mid-East Currencies									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	Period	-1	-3	-6
SA Riyal	0.2668	0.4887	0.16328	0.38403	35.106	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.4887	0.16328	0.38403	35.106	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
KW Dinar	3.2685	6.9603	2.002	4.83092	436.478	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
BH Dinar	0.3770	4.83325	1.6247	3.92003	348.284	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
CY Pound	1.8703	3.4084	1.1448	2.7824	248.084	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53

Currency Deposit Rates (Bids)									
Currency	Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	1 Year	Period	-1	-3	-6
USD	0.48	0.50	0.53	0.53	0.56	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
GBP	7.30	7.25	7.25	7.25	7.25	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
JPY	0.39	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.28	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
DEM	3.60	3.48	3.37	3.46	3.88	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
FRF	3.47	3.48	3.37	3.64	3.72	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
CHF	1.06	1.22	1.37	1.43	1.58	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53
ITL	0.04	0.58	0.58	0.58	0.58	Month	0.48	0.50	0.53

Main Equity Indices									
Source	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cts	Period	-1
New York	DOW JONES	7677.57	30.33	0.4	7705.97	7648.59	7647.10	Month	0.48
New York	S&P 500	944.47	5.28	0.56	947.38	938.21	939.21	Month	0.48
London	FT-SE 100	8553.9	15.1	0.3	8510.2	8507.43	8508.8	Month	0.48
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	14785.84	91.5	0.62	14800.9	14548.3	14644.4	Month	0.48
Paris	CAC 40	2302.85	40.39	1.41	2314.5	2281.61	2282.64	Month	0.48
Frankfurt	DAX	4153.4	72.12	1.78	4183.57	4144.55	4087.28	Month	0.48

JOD Cross Rates									
Currency	Buy	Sell	Currency	Buy	Sell	Currency	Buy	Sell	Currency
US Dollar	0.708	0.710	US Dollar	0.708	0.710	US Dollar	0.708	0.710	US Dollar
GB Sterling	1.1804	1.1862	GB Sterling	1.1804	1.1862	GB Sterling	1.1804	1.1862	GB Sterling
DE Mark	0.3877	0.3896	DE Mark	0.3877	0.3896	DE Mark	0.3877	0.3896	DE Mark
CH Franc	0.478	0.4804	CH Franc	0.478	0.4804	CH Franc	0.478	0.4804	CH Franc
FR Franc	0.1188	0.1184	FR Franc	0.1188	0.1184	FR Franc	0.1188	0.1184	FR Franc
JP Yen	0.5331	0.5308	JP Yen	0.5331	0.5308	JP Yen	0.5331	0.5308	JP Yen
NL Guilder	0.344	0.3487	NL Guilder	0.344	0.3487	NL Guilder	0.344	0.3487	NL Guilder
IT Lira	0.3841	0.3861	IT Lira	0.3841	0.3861	IT Lira	0.3841	0.3861	IT Lira

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Dolan and Kowal star for resurgent U.S. — but Aussies jubilant

PERTH (AFP) — World record holder Tom Dolan and unheralded Kristy Kowal powered the United States to the top of the swimming medal table with victories on the second night in the pool at the world championship here on Tuesday.

Olympic champion and now two-time world champion Dolan's win in the 400 metres individual medley was anticipated, but Kowal was a stunning winner of the women's 100m breaststroke final.

With Jenny Thompson's victory on Monday in the women's 100m freestyle, the U.S. now have three gold medals in two days of competition in the pool.

The Americans were bidding for a third gold on the night in Tuesday's final event but were blown away by Australia, who stormed to victory in championship time in the 200m freestyle relay.

The Australians' 4.29 seconds runaway win in 7:12.48 became Michael Klim's second gold medal of the championship following Monday's victory in the 200m freestyle. Klim will try to upset world record holder Alex Popov in Wednesday's 100m freestyle for his third gold medal from as many events.

Earlier, Costa Rican Claudia Poll picked up the missing world gold medal for her trophy cabinet with victory in the 200m freestyle to go with her Atlanta Olympics gold.

It was an euphoric night for Kowal, a 19-year-old student from Georgia who deflated the giants of women's breaststroke when she stormed home to seize the gold medal in 1 minute 08.42 seconds.



Kerstin Kielgass of Germany splashes through the pool during her 200m freestyle heat at the 8th World Swimming Championships in Perth. Kielgass qualified for the finals in second place with a time of two minutes, 00.07 seconds, behind Claudia Poll of Costa Rica (Reuters photo)

Kowal touched out Australian number two Helen Denman (1:08.51) and Canadian Lauren van Oosten (1:08.66) in a blanket finish with first to last separated by just 0.74 seconds.

World champion and Australia's swim darling Samantha Riley and Olympic champion Penny Heyns of South Africa missed out on the medals.

"No-one knew who I was when I came here and I used that to my advantage tonight," said Kowal. "I'm feeling sheer and utter joy. This is the absolute highlight in my life — it is a personal best, it is a gold medal, it is everything."

Kowal, who won a bronze medal behind Riley in the event at the Pan Pacific Games in Fukuoka last August, was ranked just sixth in the world last year.

"At the 50m I turned and saw a few swimmers ahead of me, but I've been working on my second 50m," she said.

"I couldn't see my name on the board. When I didn't see it at first, I didn't know whether to cry or smile.... it's the best thing I've seen in my life."

Heyns was fifth in 1:08.77, and Riley, who led the field to the turn in 31.90secs, was sixth in 1:08.80, but she was just 0.38 seconds behind Kowal.

Dolan swept to victory in the medley clocking 4:14.95 — outside his world record set when he won the title at the last world championship in Rome in 1994.

"It hurt," said Dolan, an asthma sufferer. "I had a tough summer last year with my breathing and I wasn't feeling well."

Dolan's preparations

included a visit here a year ago when he trained with the University of Michigan team and felt at ease with the clean Perth air.

"There's some great swimmers out there and it was really tough but I was really happy to repeat this at the world championships," said 22-year-old Dolan from Virginia.

"I wasn't feeling great, but I got out real well and once I'm ahead there's nothing that can stop me."

The Australians, led off by the in-form Klim, built an unassailable lead, firstly over the Americans, and then the rest of the field in their slashing relay performance.

Youngsters Grant Hackett and Ian Thorpe widened the gap, with 15-year-old Thorpe swimming his first half in 52.18secs, and senior team member Daniel Kowalski had the chance of eclipsing the world record

before hitting the wall in 7:12.48.

Australia blitzed the Netherlands (7:16.77) and Britain (7:17.33) with the fancied US trailing in fifth place behind Germany.

It was a special moment for Popov's Russian coach Gennadi Touretski, who plotted the Australian team's bid to shatter the Unified Russian team's world record of 7:11.95, who he also coached at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

Olympic champion Claudia Poll of Costa Rica led all the way to land the women's 200m freestyle final in 1:58.90 from Slovakia's multi Student Games champion Martina Moravcova. Monday's 100m freestyle silver medalist, and Australian Julia Greville.

"The (world) gold medal in the 200m was the only thing missing, so I am pretty happy and hope to do the same tomorrow (in the 400m freestyle)," said Poll. Poll paid tribute to her coach Francisco Rivas for her swimming achievements.

"Because of the coach, I have world short course record, the Olympic gold medal and now the world championship," she said.

"He motivates me, I'm 25, but I feel 15 and just starting out.... he's a genius."

Poll said she was going to swim in the World Cup series in March in Brazil, Italy, Sweden and France, and she intended to focus later in the year on the Goodwill Games.

She could claim a second gold medal in Wednesday's 400m freestyle.



Tom Dolan of the United States powers through the water on his way to winning gold in the men's 400m Individual Medley final at the 8th World Swimming Championships in Perth. Marcel Wouda of the Netherlands won the silver and Curtis Myden of Canada the bronze (Reuters photo)

MEDALS TABLE

Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
USA	6	1	2	9
Russia	5	1	2	8
China	4	4	2	10
Australia	2	3	3	8
Italy	1	1	2	4
Ukraine	1	1	0	2
Belgium	1	0	0	1
Costa Rica	1	0	0	1
Germany	0	3	2	5
Netherlands	0	3	2	5
Slovakia	0	2	0	2
France	0	1	0	1
Spain	0	1	0	1
Japan	0	0	2	2
Canada	0	0	2	2
Argentina	0	0	1	1
Britain	0	0	1	1

Popov set for Klim showdown

PERTH (AFP) — Russian sprint tsar Alexander Popov and Australian Michael Klim are the best of friends in the training pool in Canberra under mutual coach Gennadi Touretski — yet both are on a collision course for world gold here Wednesday.

Popov is chasing his second world 100-metre freestyle crown to go with his two Olympic gold medals in the event, while his young contender Klim is bidding to dethrone him as the fastest man in water.

Popov ranks with Australian Kieren Perkins as a modern-day swimming icon.

Such is Popov's galvanising effect on a major meet that he is expected to go under his world record, yet he is in no way predicting any lowering of his three-and-a-half-year record on Wednesday.

"It comes automatically. You just step on the blocks and just do it, you never think about it," 26-year-old Popov said this week of breaking his world record.

"The limit is in your head, not in your arms, not in your muscles. Your head should be prepared for the fast swim and if it's not you can put the fins on, but you still wouldn't do anything."

"I guess I am a little bit better than I was for the European championship last year, so hopefully it will help."

Any thoughts that Popov would be psychologically as well as physically scarred by a late-night knife attack from a drunken Muscovite watermelon seller in the weeks after the August 1996 Olympics have been erased by his return to sensational times last year.

Heading into Wednesday's 100m showdown with Klim, the newly-crowned world 200m freestyle champion, Popov remains No.1 ranked in the world with a best swim of 49.02secs, the fourth best of all-time and under a second outside his world record of 48.21secs.

Like the consummate champion, Popov is supremely confident of his powers and is ready again to take on all-comers for his world title, even from the shaven-headed

Klim.

"We're still good friends, we're still sharing the lane in the (training) pool, we're still sharing the gym, we're doing the same amount of work, but he's doing his preparation and I'm doing my own preparation."

"He's a good guy, a good personality and he's maturing and he's developing and it's good to see the younger generation is able to do the same things as I did a few years ago."

"I don't feel under any pressure" that Michael is going to be racing me.

"I'm here to do my job and he's here to do his best and that's the big difference."

Klim, 20, finished last year just over one-tenth of a second behind Popov in the rankings and gets his chance against the Russian superstar before his home crowd.

"I have been training with Gennadi Touretski for more than four years and over that time I've come to know him pretty well and we've become good friends."

"Alex is a competitor of mine but we've been able to put that aside and just make sure we know what we have to do in the pool and we've bonded pretty well."

China's Yan Chen will be seeking to add the 400m freestyle title to Monday's 400m medley gold medal on Wednesday. Her main opposition looks likely to come from Claudia Poll of Costa Rica, who added the world title to her Olympic 200m freestyle title on Tuesday.

Chinese teammates World No.1 Zhen Yingjun and world champion He Chong look to have the women's 100m backstroke to themselves.

Australian Scott Goodman is the top-ranked swimmer heading into the men's 200m butterfly but faces challenges for the gold medal from Americans Ugur Taner and Tom Malchow and French European champion Frank Esposito.

Jenny Thompson's win in Monday's 100m and Amy Van Dyken's fourth placing have the Americans strongly placed for gold in the women's 4x100m freestyle relay.

Economic woes threaten Osaka's Games bid

NAGANO (AFP) — Japan hosts its third Olympics next month in Nagano and is already eyeing a fourth in 2008, but critics have warned the nation's economic woes may dash that ambition.

Thanks to rapid economic growth in the post-war period, Japan has hosted the prestigious but costly extravaganza twice before — the 1964 Summer Games in Tokyo and the 1972 Winter Games in Sapporo.

Japan has now announced another bid to host another Games in the summer of 2008 in the western Japanese city of Osaka.

But some analysts believe Japan may not be able to afford another Games with the country's economy heading into the doldrums.

"The era of Japan enjoying ever-continued growth and using its powerful currency in the global scene is

virtually over," said Hideaki Kuribara, an analyst at Nikko Research Centre Ltd.

He believes the economic situation means Japan is unlikely to repeat the money-oriented campaign the nation used when it beat Salt Lake City in the 1991 election for the 1998 Winter Olympics.

Nagano earned these Games by spending as much as two billion yen (\$15 million).

"Japan's economic condition has totally changed since Nagano won the Games," Kuribara said.

After the speculative "bubble economy" boom of the late 1980s, Japan has struggled to recover from a prolonged slump. Its currency has recently fallen victim to Southeast Asia's currency turmoil.

The Japanese public's passion for the Olympics has been further depressed

by skyrocketing operational costs of the mammoth event. The operational cost of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics hit \$1.7 billion.

A survey, conducted by the Asahi Shimbun newspaper last June, showed that the number supporting the hosting of the Olympics fell from 65 percent in 1992 to 59 percent this year.

The poll covered some 2,200 people, of which 75 per cent responded.

When Osaka was chosen as Japan's official candidate for the 2008 Games, the influential newspaper said: "Olympics are a great chance for the host city, but they could turn into a burden. For Osaka, it's a big gamble."

But Japanese government officials say the Olympics were still worth hosting as the event would have an tremendous impact on the economy.

In 1964, when Tokyo hosted the nation's first Olympics, Japan started a bullet train service between the capital and the western Japanese city of Osaka.

Sapporo, taking advantage of the 1972 Games, pushed infrastructure development, including the construction of subway networks, which turned a poor forlorn northern city into the nation's fifth largest city.

Another superfast bullet train between Tokyo and Nagano went into service in October, while Matsumoto Airport, located 60 kilometres south of Nagano city, was upgraded.

Critics, however, believe the Olympic impact is actually less than expected.

"Only limited parties such as sponsors, television networks and construction firms can receive benefit, while organisers are urged to use a huge amount of

tax," Takashi Hirose, a Japanese author and sports critic, said.

"The Olympics impact on the entire Japanese economy is actually very limited," Hirose said. "I don't think the Olympics itself would help support the nation's economy."

Some citizens' groups have called on Osaka to drop its campaign for the 2008 Olympic host, saying that the multi-billion dollar event would involve extra spending of tax payers' money.

To meet criteria set by the IOC, Osaka decided last year to build a new main stadium and swimming pools at a cost of at least 80 billion yen.

The city has already estimated an annual loss of 1.4 billion yen to maintain the sport facilities now under construction.

'France can handle English hooligans'

LONDON (AFP) — Trouble involving England fans in the World Cup finals can be avoided if the French authorities learn from the mistakes of the Italians, according to the police chief appointed by the British government to co-ordinate anti-hooligan policy.

Sir Brian Hayes described the organisation of England's riot-torn qualifier against Italy in Rome in October as "absolute chaos."

But he believes the events at the Olympic Stadium might have been a 'blessing in disguise' in terms of providing valuable lessons in how to combat violence.

Hayes, Deputy Commissioner in London's Metropolitan police, says it will be 'very lucky' if the summer's tournament passes off without incident, but he is confident that co-ordinated hooliganism can be beaten.

"I think there is a danger you can inflame the situation and create a mindset in the fans and the police that there is going to be trouble," Hayes told AFP before leaving for Paris to meet the World Cup organisers on Tuesday.

"The way fans are treated is vital. If you have police on the side of road banging their sticks on their hands looking for a punch-up, you have got a problem."

West Ham fan Hayes, a first dan in karate and judo, claims that the reputation of a few hard-core thugs and the problems of the 1980's have tarnished the reputation of all English fans.

"There are only about 200 real hardcore hooligans in England. The trouble is that there are plenty of fans who, if they get really aggravated, can get sucked into trouble. 'If they can't get into the

ground and are driven around for hours in coaches as they were in Italy and then the police start pushing them around and getting aggressive, you can imagine people getting very very angry."

"Then you are likely to get a situation on your hands where hundreds even thousands of people who never dreamt of causing trouble start saying 'I've had enough of this'."

Hayes, who speaks fluent French and Spanish as well as passable German and Portuguese, has been impressed by the willingness of the French to learn from the experience of the English police.

"We will not be telling the French what to do," added Hayes. "This show is being run by the French and we are there to help them."

"But what we can say is

that we have spent 15 years dealing with a major hooligan problem and developed procedures which we think have worked."

"Some of our French colleagues came across in Euro '96 and were impressed by what they saw particularly in terms of our movement of crowds, segregation, ticket distribution and stewarding inside the stadiums."

"The French also know

what happened in Italy. They read all the reports. It might have been a blessing in disguise and we've all learnt enormously from what happened there."

Hayes is worried that the availability of alcohol near World Cup grounds could stoke up trouble and he is keen to ensure that ticket allocation is strictly controlled to avoid potential trouble-makers.

CINEMA	TEL: 634144	CINEMA	TEL: 634144	CINEMA	TEL: 666238	CINEMA	TEL: 677430	CINEMA	TEL: 678330	CINEMA	TEL: 678330	Hisham Yanes Theatre	TEL: 625155
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George Clooney & Nicole Kidman ... in		Steven Spielberg's Wonderful film		SCREAM	Shows: 12:00, 6:30	CONSPIRACY THEORY	Shows: 12:00, 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:45	ABDOUN Demi Moore ... in		ABDOUN Jim Carie... in		NOW ON DAILY	
THE PEACEMAKER		Twister		AL MASEER (Arabic)	Nour Al Sharif Shows: 8:30, 10:45	MURDER 1600	Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	THE JUROR	Shows: 8:30, 10:30	THE CABLE GUY	Shows: 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE	
Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30		Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30		HERCULES	Shows: 2:00 p.m.	MR. BEAN	Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE	Shows: 2:00, 6:30			Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas	
												For reservations call: 640155, 625155	

Israeli trade minister front-runner to replace Levy — press

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Natan Sharansky, a former Soviet Gulag inmate and currently Israel's trade minister, is the front-runner to become Israel's new foreign minister, the Maariv newspaper reported Tuesday.

The newspaper quoted foreign ministry sources as saying Mr. Sharansky had already expressed his interest in taking over the post from David Levy, the political moderate who resigned last week.

Mr. Sharansky, who arrived in Israel in 1986 and turns 50 next week, is considered close to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and is popular abroad, but is not seen as a potential rival to the right-wing leader back home.

Mr. Sharansky presents himself as a supporter of the peace process with the Palestinians but has sided with hardliners on the need to defend Jewish settlements and restrict the amount of West Bank land turned over to Palestinian control.

Mr. Levy resigned in protest at the deadlock in the peace process and over cuts in social spending under the new state budget adopted by parliament last week.

Israeli analysts said Mr. Netanyahu's interest in naming Mr. Sharansky to the high profile diplomatic post could be linked to his need for support from Mr. Sharansky's Israel B'Aliya party in an upcoming battle over religious conversions in Israel.

Mr. Sharansky's group, representing recent Russian immigrants, had threatened to bolt government if Mr. Netanyahu went ahead with legislation formalising the Orthodox religious establishment's monopoly over conversions to Judaism.

Israel B'Aliya accounts

for seven deputies in Mr. Netanyahu's 61-59 seat majority in parliament.

The new religious legislation is strongly opposed by the more liberal currents in Judaism to which a large majority of diaspora Jews, particularly in the United States, belong.

Mr. Netanyahu has been seeking for months to arrange a compromise between Orthodox and reform Jews over the issue, but has said if no deal is possible he will support the legislation.

The bill will formalise in law the de facto monopoly of the Orthodox rabbinate over civil affairs, including conversions to Judaism and marriages.

Many Russian immigrants have had difficulty obtaining official recognition of their Jewishness from Orthodox religious authorities in Israel.

Israeli deputy says religious bickering will cause 'civil war'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — An ultra-Orthodox member of parliament warned Tuesday that a wave of attacks by secular Israelis on religious Jews was pushing his community towards armed retaliation and a "civil war."

"There has been an increase in violence against ultra-Orthodox students by secular Israelis," said Moshe Gafni, a Knesset deputy from the ultra-religious United Torah Judaism Party, part of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition.

"We are in the midst of a civil war and only our side is being attacked. This will lead to murder," he said on Israel Radio.

"If the secular Jews want a war, we will fight them," said Mr. Gafni.

In a speech Monday Mr. Gafni declared, "Our blood will not be shed. We will form [undercover] fighting units against the secular."

The deputy's comments sparked harsh criticism from politicians across the political spectrum.

"Instead of talking about

reconciliation between the secular and religious, Gafni has poured oil on the fire," said Roman Bronfman of the centrist Israel B'Aliya party.

Rehavim Zeevi of the far-right secular Moledet party also assailed Mr. Gafni. "It's not possible that a member of the Knesset would threaten us with a civil war because of a few incidents,"

Mr. Gafni mentioned several recent attacks on ultra-Orthodox students including one last week in which a student walking from prayers at a synagogue near Tel Aviv was stabbed and lightly injured by secular youths.

Tensions between Orthodox and secular Israelis has risen steadily since religious parties gained a dominant place in Mr. Netanyahu's government in May 1996 elections.

Over the past 18 months, the religious parties which now control the education, transportation and labour ministries have sought to expand ultra-Orthodox

institutions and strengthen the application of laws barring all business on the Jewish Sabbath.

In addition, secular ire against the religious increased after a report last week found that 60 per cent of ultra-Orthodox Jewish men do not work but study religious texts while living off state welfare and the earnings of their wives.

Secular Israelis also resent the religious for their exemption from military service that is required for two or three years of all Israelis who are not studying in religious seminaries.

"If Gafni is preparing for a civil war, he should go train in the army and then his desire for a war will dissipate," Yossi Sarid of the left-wing Meretz Party told Israel Radio.

Jews with an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle — dedicated to the study of religious and strict respect of religious law — make up only six per cent of the Israeli population, although they account for 40 per cent of the residents in Jerusalem.

Turkey, Turkish-Cypriots take step towards integration

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriot entity on Tuesday moved closer to their planned "integration," signing a protocol under which Turkish-Cypriot officials may represent Ankara in foreign diplomatic missions, the Turkish-Cypriot news agency TAK reported.

"Foreign ministries of the two countries may exchange personnel and appoint them to posts in their foreign missions," said the protocol.

"Our state will deepen relations in all fields with Turkey, our sole supporter," Turkish-Cypriot Prime Minister Dervis Eroglu told reporters at a signing ceremony.

The document was signed in the Cypriot capital's Turkish-held sector by visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Turkish-Cypriot Foreign Minister Taner Ekin.

As the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is recognised by no country but Turkey, in practice the protocol will apply only for Turkish-Cypriot officials serving as Turkish diplomats.

The move followed a December decision by the European Union (EU) to launch EU membership talks this year with Cyprus' internationally-recognised Greek-Cypriot government despite strong Turkish opposition.

Ankara and Turkish-Cypriot

leader Rauf Denktaş have already warned that the TRNC would enter a "partial integration" with Turkey in the event the EU goes ahead with plans to admit Cyprus.

In another development, a Turkish-Cypriot newspaper reported Tuesday that Turkey was planning to create three new naval and air bases in occupied northern Cyprus as a counter-measure to the opening of a military base in the southwest of the island by the Greek-Cypriot government.

"Turkey decides to retaliate to opening of Paphos air base," read the headline in Kibris newspaper, referring to the base to be opened later this month.

The paper said Turkey plans to build two naval bases on the east and west coasts of northern Cyprus, where the Turkish-Cypriot community in 1983 declared the TRNC. A third project involves transforming a tiny airport in the eastern Famagusta region into an air base, the newspaper wrote.

Cyprus President Glafcos Clerides, a Greek-Cypriot, said Friday that the new air base in Paphos would be ready for use on Jan. 24.

Mr. Rauf Denktaş has asked the United Nations, the United States and Britain to prevent Cyprus from opening the base and had threatened to set up a similar one in the Turkish-held north.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry at the weekend issued a strong warning against the air base plan, with Mr. Hakan Fidan saying: "By offering a military base to Greece, the Greek side of the island is preparing its own suicide."

Greek-Cypriot defence officials said Monday that two Turkish spy planes had twice violated Cypriot airspace, flying over the Paphos air base.

Cypriot Television quoted them as saying that the two RF-4 aircraft were believed to have photographed the air base, where controversial Russian built S-300 missiles due for delivery in the summer are expected to be installed.

Turkey has also warned it would take action against the missile deployment, saying the S-300s threaten its own security.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when mainland Turkish troops invaded its northern third in response to a Greek-Cypriot coup in Nicosia aimed at uniting the island with Greece.

Two rounds of U.N.-sponsored talks between Mr. Clerides and Mr. Denktaş failed last year mainly due to the row on Cyprus' EU membership.

Mr. Denktaş says he would attend talks with the Greek Cypriots only if his self-declared state is granted equal status with the Cyprus government.



UNEXPECTED CONTESTANT: Czech swimmer Cerna Hanas gets a surprise during laps in the warm down pool when a duck joined her in the water at the World Swimming Championships in Perth, Australia, Tuesday (AP photo)

EU mission set to visit Algeria this week

BRUSSELS (AFP) — A European Union fact-finding mission to Algeria should be dispatched by the end of this week providing Algerians agree, senior foreign ministry officials from the 15 EU states agreed on Tuesday.

The officials also defined a strictly limited mandate for the visit, which marks the first tentative attempt by the EU to get involved in the crisis in Algeria since a bloody civil war began there in 1992.

The main objectives of the mission will be to convey a message of solidarity to the Algerian people and gather information on the current situation following a wave of massacres that has left more than 1,000 dead already this year, diplomats said.

The team, to be made up of officials — but not ministers — from Britain, Austria and Luxembourg, will also assure the Algerian authorities of the EU's support in combating terrorism.

In a bid to assuage Algeria's military government's hostility to interference in the country's internal affairs, it was also agreed that the EU diplomats would only have contact with government officials.

The mission will not be going with

an offer of humanitarian aid to the victims of the massacres. The EU has already made such an offer publicly but the Algerian authorities have said it is not required.

"This will be a first contact only with government officials," said one EU diplomat. "The general tone is one of prudence and realism."

All previous proposals for EU intervention were blocked by France, the former colonial power in Algeria. The wave of horrific massacres over recent weeks, however, has made continued silence on the crisis untenable and Paris has come round to accepting the need for action under the EU umbrella.

Algeria has said it will welcome the mission on condition the EU confines its mandate to discussions on fighting terrorism.

Anything that smacks of an investigation into who is responsible for the massacres will not be tolerated, Algeria's military-backed rulers have made clear.

International human rights groups have urged the EU not to side-step the issue of responsibility for the massacres.

The majority of them are believed to be the work of Islamists. But there is also evidence that the armed forces have been involved in some incidents as well as having frequently failed to come to the aid of civilians in distress.

Britain, Luxembourg and Austria are to represent the EU in their roles as the current, last and next holders of the bloc's rotating presidency. The plan is for the officials to report back to foreign ministers at their monthly meeting on Jan. 26, when further steps to help stem the killings will be discussed.

Norway is also planning to send a special envoy to Algeria for talks on the crisis there and to offer humanitarian aid, Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek said here Tuesday.

"Algerians has not yet formally agreed to receive our special envoy, but we have no reason to believe that the Algerian authorities will refuse to cooperate," Mr. Vollebaek, who is visiting Copenhagen, told reporters.

The mission will be mainly humanitarian, he said, "because we cannot sit back and watch people being massacred every day."

Bus plunges into river in India, 69 people feared drowned

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least 69 people, most teenage school children, were feared drowned Tuesday after their bus skidded in fog and plunged into a river in India's West Bengal state, police and news reports said.

The bus was bringing 10th and 11th grade students back from a picnic in Murshidabad district, 190 kilometres north of Calcutta City in eastern India.

Rescuers saved 17 students. Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency said quoting police. Many residents of nearby villages participated in the rescue operations led by police and divers from the government port department. Some students swam ashore.

By evening, police had recovered 53 bodies from the swirling waters of the Bhagirathi River and had pulled the bus out of the river, said Prasun Mukherjee, deputy inspector general of police. Many of those who drowned were trapped in the bus.

Rescue workers pulled the bus out of the river using cranes, police said. Rescuers and divers using speedboats were still searching in the waters for 13 missing students and three other people.

The driver, speeding through the early morning fog, lost control of the bus and careened into the river in an area where huge parts of the roads had been eroded by rapids, Mr. Mukherjee said.

Most of the students were asleep in the bus when the accident occurred, the PTI said.

Survivors said they saw the driver of the bus swim ashore but authorities were still trying to confirm the report.

GIA mostly responsible for Algerian carnage — U.S.

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States said Monday that "the great majority" of the horrific attacks against civilians in Algeria are the work of Islamist hardliners in the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

But the U.S. State Department conceded that the situation was "complex" and that local government self-defence groups also might be involved in the carnage.

State Department spokesman James Rubin said the United States favours fact-finding efforts by a special U.N. rapporteur as well as non-governmental organisations and the media "to make sure that the basic facts in this area are as well-known as they can be."

In the latest incident, an armed group on Sunday killed 103 people and wounded 70 others in the Algerian village of Sid Hamet, according to local security forces.

"We believe that the Islamic

extremist organisation, the GIA, is responsible for the great majority of these atrocities and we condemn these terrorist atrocities in the strongest possible terms," Mr. Rubin said.

"Some personnel in local government guard groups may also be involved to some extent," he added.

Mr. Rubin was apparently referring to thousands of community guards and "patriots" who are patrolling rural areas that the Algerian police and army have difficulty in protecting.

"The situation is complex," Mr. Rubin said, "and that is why we have encouraged fact-finding missions to go in [Algeria] and try to clarify what is going on."

It was the first time that a U.S. official so unequivocally linked the GIA with the massacres in Algeria, echoing the Algerian government's charges against the Islamists.

In the past, Washington had

accused the Algerian security forces of committing excesses in their fight against Islamist groups.

Mr. Rubin said the Algerian government "should do all it can to protect civilians and bring the perpetrators to justice while meeting the standards of the rule of law."

Asked about the possibility of a dialogue between the Algerian government and Islamist forces, Mr. Rubin said that "our views on dialogue are well known and they have not changed."

Washington seeks a broad dialogue between Algerian authorities and the non-violent opposition.

The violence dates back to 1992 when the military cancelled general elections that an Islamist party was poised to win. Since then, at least 60,000 people have died in a spiral of violence.

Amnesty International puts the toll at 80,000.

Diana's car 'only travelling at 60 miles per hour' — documentary

LONDON (AFP) — The Mercedes in which Diana, Princess of Wales, was travelling before her death was moving at half the 120 miles per hour (192 kilometres per hour) that has been widely accepted, a leading British accident investigator will claim in a British television documentary later Tuesday.

And, says Professor Murray Mackay, professor of transport safety at the University of Birmingham, all four occupants of the car would have survived if crash barriers had been fitted in the Paris tunnel where the accident happened.

Prof. Mackay studied material from the French police and visited the road tunnel where the accident occurred.

The programme includes a computer simulation of the

accident in which the 36-year-old princess was killed with companion Dodi Fayed and driver Henri Paul. Only bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones survived.

"Newspapers have talked of speeds of 120 miles per hour [192 kilometres per hour] but looking at the damage tells a very different story," said Prof. Mackay. "It suggests an impact with the pillar of about 60 miles per hour [96 kilometres per hour]."

"This was a severe but a survivable accident."

"What we now need to consider is why three people died."

He said that if the car had crashed at 120 miles per hour (192 kilometres per hour), the entire passenger compartment would have been destroyed.

He added that the princess had the best chance of survival because she was sitting in the rear right seat which would have suffered the least force when the car hit the pillar and spun.

If she had been wearing a seat belt, she would have had a "fair chance" of living, said Prof. Mackay.

French police probing Diana's death on Aug. 31 have established that driver Paul was a confirmed drinker and used the anti-depressant drug Prozac, judicial sources have said.

John Glenn could become oldest person to travel in space

WASHINGTON (AFP) — John Glenn, who in 1962 became the first American to orbit the Earth, may be destined to make another voyage to space this year, according to this week's editions of Newsweek magazine. The magazine reported that NASA is close to giving final approval for the 76-year-old U.S. senator from Ohio to participate in a space shuttle mission, as part of a study on the impact of weightlessness on the ageing process. If the septuagenarian senator's participation in October's mission of the shuttle Discovery is approved, Glenn would become the oldest person ever to travel in space.

Cabinet dispatch boxes get spy-proof makeover

LONDON (AFP) — Battered red boxes which no self-respecting British cabinet minister is ever without are being replaced with models worthy of 007 himself, superspy James Bond. The new boxes, in which ministers keep top secret government documents, will be high-tech talking, listening laptop computers costing \$3,800 each which identify their owners by their fingerprints. The old ones have been in use since the days of Prime Minister William Gladstone in the 19th century.

Czech theatre only for elegant

PRAGUE (AFP) — Prague's National Theatre has given warning: dress elegant or you're out. From February, theatre-goers will be shown the door if they turn up at the historic playhouse in jeans and T-shirts. Theatre boss Jiri Srtka said he would be seeking "elegant clothes" from his clientele. He declined to go into details about what such clothes might entail, saying his office would give further guidelines in coming weeks. He noted only that in Vienna, opera-goers are able to hire bow-ties to go to the opera.

Darlene Conley immortalised in wax

NEW YORK (AP) — Darlene Conley, who plays fashion mogul Sally Spectra in "The Bold and the Beautiful," is proud to be the first U.S. soap opera star immortalised in wax at Madame Tussaud's Museum in London. "Over here, they know a real woman when they see one," Conley says in TV Guide magazine. "The museum called and said they couldn't think of anybody more instantly recognisable than me, and who was I to argue?" Conley's day-long signing for the wax sculpture, "was grueling but hysterical. I had this beautiful young man under my skirt for hours. They measure and photograph every single inch of you from every single angle. It's terribly intimate."

U.S. author Patricia Cornwell takes in Paris morgue

PARIS (AFP) — Dead people feature heavily in Patricia Cornwell's best-sellers, so a quick trip to the city morgue was an obvious highlight of the prolific author's latest visit to Paris. Cornwell asked to see around the morgue as part of research into her next novel — the heroine in most of her books is a pathologist, Kay Scarpetta — which she hopes to partly base in the French capital. But morgues seem to be a regular part of her trips abroad anyway. "When I go to some place I like to see the facilities," she said. "I'll go to morgues all over the world if I can."

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